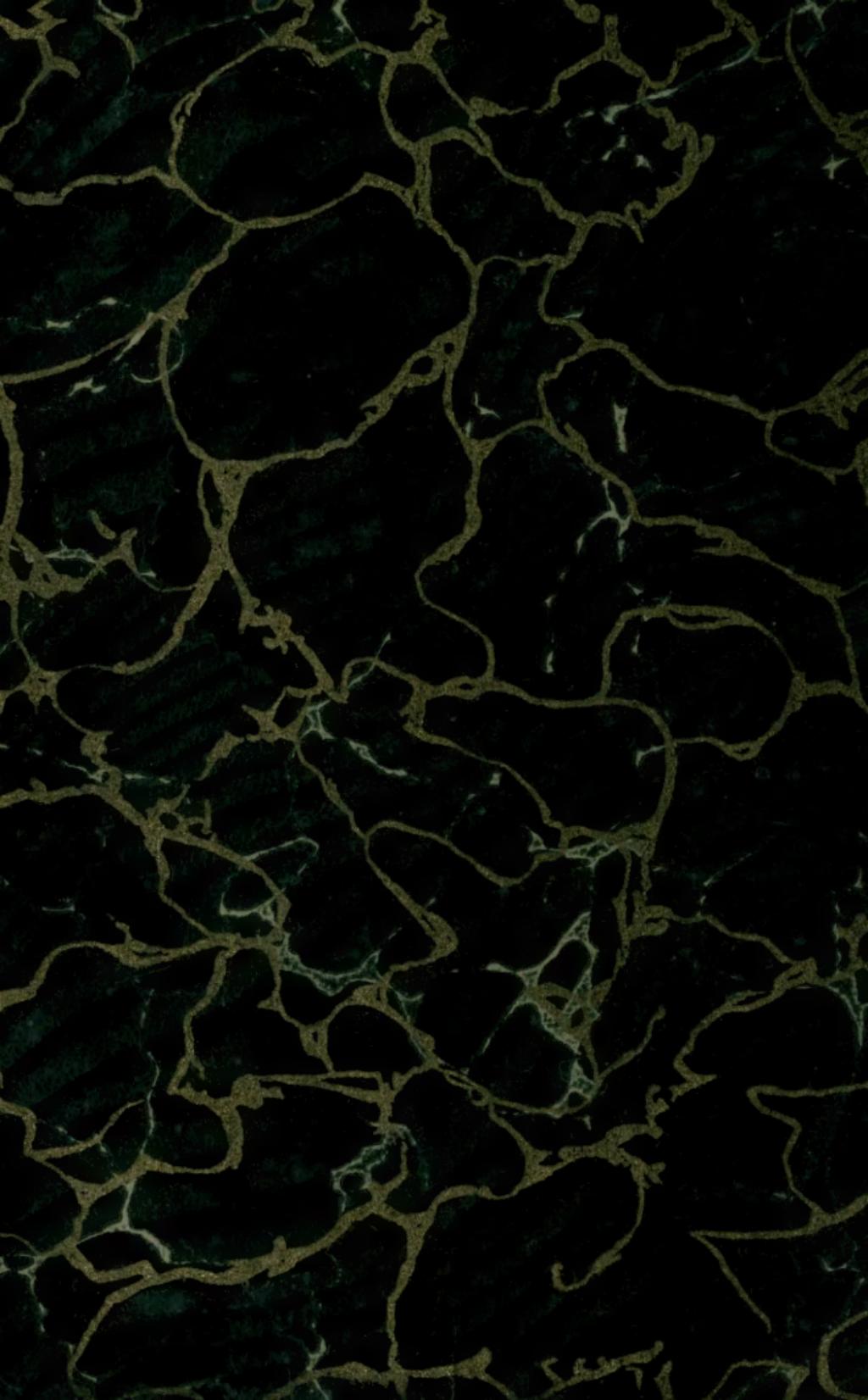


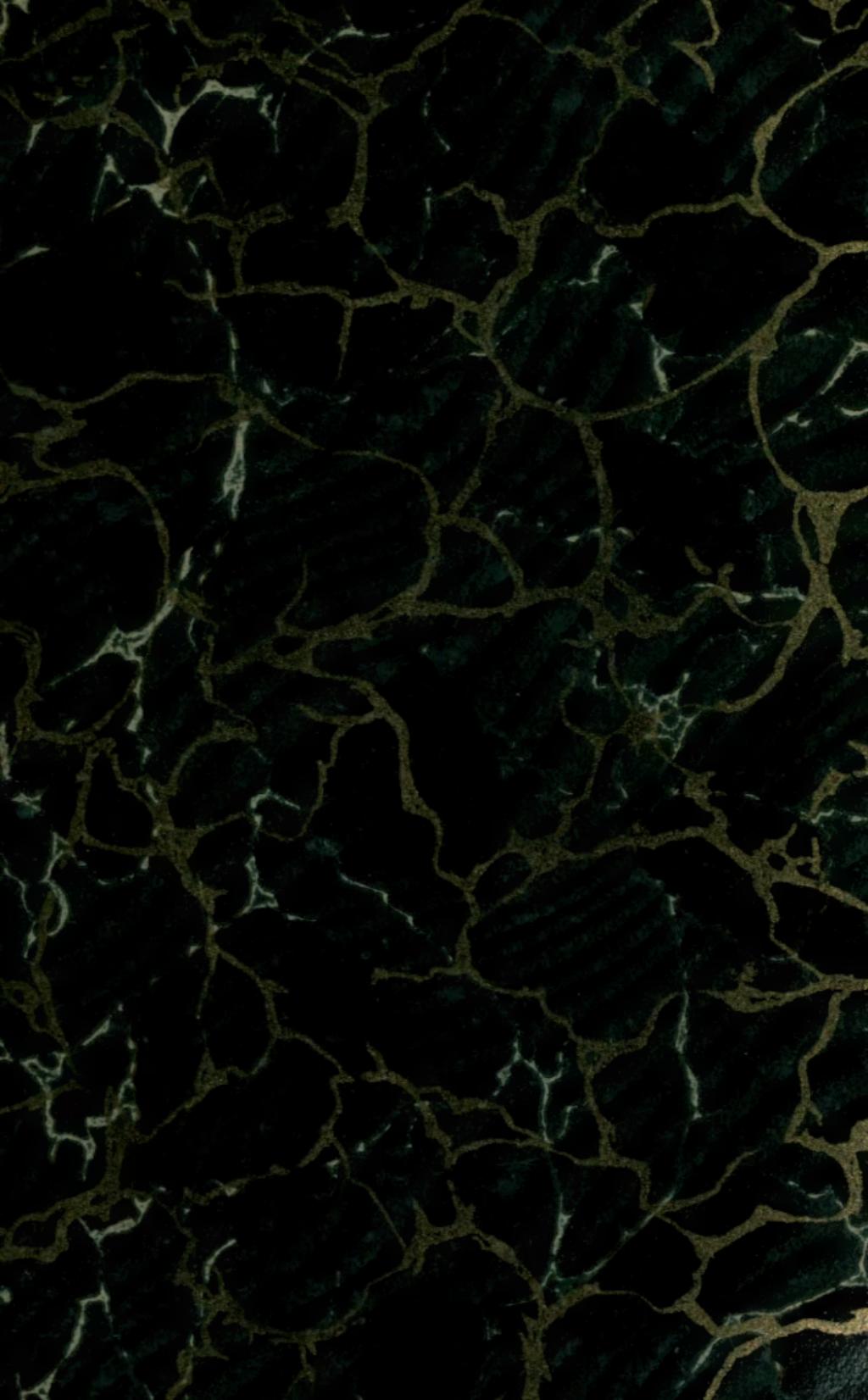
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Diane uttered a feeble cry. The Count's pallor was that of a corpse, while his smile was that of a demon.

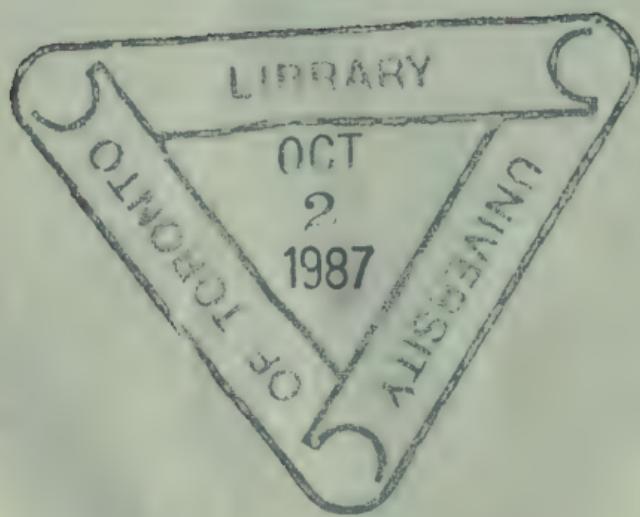
La Dame de Monsoreau

By

Alexandre Dumas



*Thomas Nelson and Sons
New York*



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LA DAME DE MONSOREAU.

CHAPTER I.

THE WEDDING OF SAINT-LUC.

ON a Sunday of the year 1578, after the popular fête and while the rumors of the joyous day were gradually dying away in the streets, a splendid reception was beginning in the magnificent hotel recently built on the other side of the Seine and almost opposite the Louvre, by that illustrious house of Montmorency, allied to royalty, and the equal of the most princely families. This private reception, following the popular fête, was given to celebrate the wedding of François d'Epinay de Saint-Luc, a friend of Henri III., and one of his most intimate favorites, with Jeanne de Cossé-Brissac, daughter of the marshal of that name.

The banquet had taken place at the Louvre, and the king, whose consent to the marriage had been obtained with great difficulty, appeared at the feast with a stern expression of countenance not at all appropriate to the occasion. Moreover, his costume was in harmony with his face (it was that dark chestnut suit in which Clouet presented him to us at the wedding of Joyeuse); and this solemn and majestic royal spectre had chilled with fear all those present, but, above all, the young bride, at whom he cast angry glances whenever his eyes wandered in her direction.

Yet the king's gloomy attitude in the midst of this joyous fête, seemed strange to none ; the cause was one of those court secrets avoided by all, like those rocks just below the surface of the water, that shipwreck all who come near them.

The repast was scarcely finished when the king rose suddenly and all were forced to do likewise, even those who secretly wished to sit longer at table.

Then Saint-Luc threw a long look on his wife, to seek courage in her eyes, and approaching the king said,—

“ Sire, will you do me the honor to accept the fête which I wish to give you, at the Hôtel de Montmorency, this evening ? ”

Henri III. turned round with mingled anger and sorrow, and facing Saint-Luc, who, with bowed head, implored him in the most beseeching tone :—

“ Yes, monsieur,” he replied, “ we shall go, though you are most undeserving of this proof of friendship on our part.”

Then Mademoiselle de Brissac, who had become Madame de Saint-Luc, humbly thanked the king. But Henri had turned his back without noticing her thanks.

“ Why is the king angry with you, Monsieur de Saint-Luc ? ” inquired the young wife.

“ I will explain later, my love,” answered Saint-Luc. “ I will tell you when this great anger shall have passed away.”

“ But will it pass away ? ” asked Jeanne.

“ It will have to pass away.”

Mademoiselle de Brissac was not yet sufficiently Madame de Saint-Luc to insist any further. She repressed her curiosity for the present, intending to find some moment more favorable to dictate her conditions and have them accepted.

Henri III. was therefore expected at the Hôtel de Montmorency at the moment this story opens. It was already eleven o'clock, and the king had not yet appeared.

Saint-Luc had invited to this ball all the king's friends and his own. He had included in the invitation the

princes and their favorites, particularly those of our old acquaintance, the Duc d'Alençon, who, on the accession of Henri III., had become Duc d'Anjou. But M. le Duc d'Anjou was not present at the banquet at the Louvre, nor did he seem more likely to appear at the fête of the Hôtel de Montmorency.

As to the King and Queen of Navarre, they had, as we have said in a former work, taken refuge in Béarn, where they made open opposition to the king by fighting at the head of the Huguenots.

M. le Duc d'Anjou, according to his custom, also made opposition ; but his opposition was hidden and treacherous. He always took good care to remain in the background, though he urged forward those of his friends who had not taken warning from the example of La Mole and Coonnas, whose terrible death our readers have doubtless not yet forgotten.

It is needless to say that his favorites and those of the king lived in a constant state of antagonism, which brought about, two or three times a month, duels in which it was not rare that some of the combatants should be either killed or badly wounded.

As for Catherine, she had reached the height of her ambition. Her favorite son had mounted the throne she was so anxious to secure for him, or rather for herself. She reigned under his name while seeming to care no more for the things of this world, and to think only of the salvation of her soul.

Saint-Luc, very uneasy at the absence of all the royal family, sought to reassure his father-in-law, who was very much concerned by this menacing absence. Convinced, like every one else, of the friendship of King Henri for Saint-Luc, he had thought he was allying himself with royal favor, whereas, it seemed, on the contrary, that his daughter had married something like a disgrace. Saint-Luc took great pains to inspire in him an assurance he did not feel himself ; and his friends Maugiron, Schomberg, and Quélus, clad in their most splendid costumes, stiff in their most gorgeous doublets, the enormous ruffs of which

looked like dishes supporting their heads, added to his anxiety by their ironical lamentations.

"Eh, *mon Dieu*! my dear friend," said Jacques de Lévis, Comte de Quélus, "I really believe that this time you are done for. The king is angry because you laughed at his advice, the Duc d'Anjou is angry because you laughed at his nose."¹

"No," answered Saint-Luc; "you are mistaken, Quélus. The king is not here because he has gone on a pilgrimage to the Minims of Vincennes, and the Duc d'Anjou is absent because he is in love with some woman I have forgotten to invite."

"Come," said Maugiron, "did you notice the king's expression at dinner? Was that the paternal expression of a man preparing to take his staff and go on a pilgrimage? And as for the Duc d'Anjou, do you imagine that if his absence were due to the motive you suppose, that would prevent his Angevins from coming? Do you see a single one here? Look! a total eclipse,—not even that swaggerer Bussy!"

"Eh, gentlemen," said the Duc de Brissac, shaking his head in desperation, "this looks to me like a complete disgrace. *Mon Dieu*! how can our house, always so devoted to his Majesty, have incurred his displeasure?"

And the old courtier sorrowfully raised his arms to heaven. The young men looked at Saint-Luc with loud bursts of laughter, which, far from soothing the marshal, only made him more dismal.

The young bride, like her father, wondered in what manner Saint-Luc had displeased the king.

Saint-Luc himself knew, and in consequence of this knowledge was the most uneasy of all.

All at once the two doors were opened wide and the King was announced.

"Ah!" radiantly exclaimed the marshal, "now I have no more fears; and if I could but hear the Duc d'Anjou announced, my satisfaction would be complete."

¹ M. le Duc d'Anjou had been so badly treated by the small-pox that he seemed to have a double nose.—TR.

" And I," murmured Saint-Luc,—“ I have more fear of the king present than absent, because he has only come to play me some trick, and the Duc d'Anjou is absent for the same purpose.”

However, notwithstanding these sad reflections, he none the less rushed to meet the king, who had at last divested himself of his sombre chestnut costume, and now advanced resplendent in satin and plumes, and glittering with jewels.

But just as King Henri III. appeared at one of the doors, another King Henri III., clad exactly like the first, appeared at the opposite door. The courtiers, who had rushed to meet the first, like the tide delayed in its course by the pillar of an arch swept back towards the second king.

Henri III. noticed the movement, and seeing before him only gaping mouths, staring eyes, and wavering bodies, exclaimed,—

“ Well, gentlemen, what is the matter ? ”

A loud burst of laughter was the reply.

The king, not naturally patient, was less so than usual that day ; he frowned, but Saint-Luc approached and said :

“ Sire, it is Chicot, your jester, who has dressed himself exactly like your Majesty, and is giving his hand to the ladies to kiss.”

Henri III. laughed. Chicot enjoyed at the court of the last of the Valois a liberty similar to that enjoyed thirty years before by Triboulet at the court of Francis I., and forty years later by Langely, at the court of King Louis XIII.

Chicot was no ordinary jester. Before becoming “ Chicot,” his name had been “ De Chicot.” He was a Gascon gentleman, who, having been ill-treated by M. de Mayenne in consequence of a love affair, in which, simple gentleman though he was, he had triumphed over the prince, had taken refuge near Henri III., and paid the successor of Charles IX. for his protection by telling him the truth.

"Eh, Master Chicot," said Henri, "two kings here ! That is a great deal."

"In that case, let me play the king as I choose, and you play the part of the Duc d'Anjou. Perhaps you will be taken for him, and hear things which will tell you, not what he is thinking, but what he is doing."

"True," said the king, casting a discontented glance around ; "my brother of Anjou is not here."

"All the more reason for you to take his place. That is settled. I am Henri, and you are François. I will be sovereign, and you will dance. I will go through the royal duties, while you, poor king, will amuse yourself a little."

The king's look rested on Saint-Luc.

"You are right, Chicot ; I shall dance," he said.

"Decidedly," thought Brissac, "I was very wrong to imagine that the king was angry with us. On the contrary, he is in the best of humors."

And he rushed to the right and to the left, congratulating every one, and congratulating himself more particularly on having given his daughter to a man who stood so high in his Majesty's favor.

However, Saint-Luc had approached his wife. Mademoiselle de Brissac was not a beauty, but she had charming black eyes, white teeth, and a dazzling complexion, all of which made a most attractive face.

"Monsieur," she said to her husband, still following her same thoughts, "why did they say that the king was angry with me ? Since his arrival, he has done nothing but smile on me."

"You did not tell me that after dinner, dear Jeanne, for his look then frightened you."

"His Majesty was probably in a bad humor," said the young wife, "but now—"

"Now it is much worse," interrupted Saint-Luc ; "the king laughs with compressed lips. I would much rather he showed his teeth. Jeanne, my poor love, the king is preparing some disagreeable surprise for us. Oh, don't look at me so tenderly, I beg. Turn your back on me.

Here comes Maugiron ; take possession of him, hold him, be amiable with him."

" Do you know, monsieur, that you are making a strange request," said Jeanne, with a smile ; " were I to obey to the letter, one might think—"

" Ah ! " said Saint-Luc, with a sigh, " that would be all the better."

And turning his back on his wife, whose astonishment knew no bounds, he went to pay his court to Chicot, who played his part of king with the most laughable majesty and success.

However, Henri, who had abandoned his greatness, took advantage of this temporary liberty to dance ; but while he danced he never lost sight of Saint-Luc.

Sometimes he would call him, to repeat some funny speech, which, witty or not, always made Saint-Luc laugh heartily. Sometimes he would offer him out of his comfit-box, sugar-plums or candied fruits, which Saint-Luc found delicious. Finally, if Saint-Luc disappeared for an instant from the room in which the king stood, to do the honors in one of the others, the king immediately sent one of his relatives or officers in quest of the truant, and Saint-Luc would return and smilingly resume his place beside his master, who only seemed happy when near him.

All at once a noise, sufficiently loud to be heard above all this tumult, arrested Henri's attention.

" Oh, oh ! " he said, " I think I hear Chicot's voice ; do you hear, Saint-Luc, the king is angry."

" Yes, sire," said Saint-Luc, without seeming to notice his Majesty's allusion ; " he seems to be quarrelling with some one."

" Go and see," said the king, " and return at once, to tell me what it is."

Saint-Luc obeyed. In fact, Chicot could be heard, crying out through his nose as the king sometimes did :—

" I made sumptuary laws, but if those I made do not suffice, I will make more ; I will make them until I have enough ; if they are not good, they will at least be

numerous. By the horn of Beelzebub, my cousin, six pages, Monsieur de Bussy,—that is too much ! ”

And Chicot, puffing his cheeks, drawing himself up, and putting his hand to his side, imitated the king to perfection.

“ What is he saying about Bussy ? ” asked the king, frowning.

Saint-Luc had returned and was about to reply, when the crowd opened and showed him six pages, dressed in cloth of gold, covered with chains, and bearing on their breasts the arms of their master glittering in jewels. Behind them came a man, young, handsome, and haughty, who walked with his head proudly erect, an insolent glance and disdainful smile, and whose simple dress of black velvet contrasted with the rich costumes of his pages,

“ Bussy,” they said, “ Bussy d’Amboise.” And all rushed to meet the young man who caused this rumor, and stood aside to let him pass.

Maugiron, Schomberg, and Quélus had taken their places near the king, as though to defend him.

“ See ! ” said the first, alluding to the unexpected presence of Bussy, and the continued absence of the Duc d’Anjou, “ here is the servant, but where is the master ? ”

“ Patience,” answered Quélus ; “ before the servant, came the servants of the servant ; the master of the servant is perhaps behind the master of the first servants.” “ Look, Saint-Luc,” said Schomberg, the youngest and also the bravest of King Henri’s favorites, “ do you know that M. de Bussy is not doing you much honor ? Look at that black doublet. *Mordieu*, that is no wedding garment ! ”

“ No,” said Quélus, “ but it is a funeral garment.”

“ Ah ! ” murmured Henri, “ would that it were his own funeral, and that he were wearing mourning for himself, in advance ! ”

“ With all that, Saint-Luc,” said Maugiron, “ M. d’Anjou is not behind Bussy. Are you also in disgrace with him ? ”

That "also" wounded Saint-Luc to the heart.

"Why should he follow Bussy?" continued Quélus.
"Do you not remember that when his Majesty did M. de Bussy the honor to ask him if he would not belong to him, M. de Bussy replied, that being of the house of Clermont, there was no need for him to belong to any one, and that he would purely and simply belong to himself, certain that he should find in himself the best prince in the world?"

The king frowned, and bit his moustache.

"Yet, whatever you may say," replied Maugiron, "he belongs to the Duc d'Anjou."

"Well," coolly replied Quélus, "because the Duc d'Anjou is greater than our king."

This observation was the most annoying that could be made before Henri, who had always cordially detested the Duc d'Anjou. Therefore, though he answered not a word, he turned pale.

"Come, come, gentlemen," Saint-Luc ventured to say in a trembling voice, "have a little charity for my guests, and don't spoil my wedding-day."

These words of Saint-Luc probably brought back other thoughts to Henri's mind.

"Yes," he said, "we must not spoil Saint-Luc's wedding-day."

He spoke these words and curled his moustache with a mocking look which did not escape the poor bridegroom's notice.

"Well," cried Schomberg, "is Bussy related to the Brissacs?"

"Why, so?" inquired Maugiron.

"Because here is Saint-Luc defending him. The devil! in this poor world, we have quite enough to do in defending ourselves; therefore we only defend our relatives, connections, and friends."

"Gentlemen," said Saint-Luc, "M. de Bussy is neither my friend, my connection, nor my relative; he is my guest."

The king shot a furious glance at Saint-Luc.

"Besides," added the latter, terrified by the king's glance, "I am not at all defending him."

Bussy gravely approached behind his pages and was going to salute the king, when Chicot, insulted that others should have the precedence of the respect due to him, cried out :

"Eh, there ! Bussy, Bussy d'Amboise, Louis de Clermont, Comte de Bussy. Is it necessary to give you all your names to let you know that you are being addressed ? Do you not see the true Henri ? Do you not distinguish the king from the jester ? The one to whom you are going, is Chicot, my jester, my buffoon, who does so many droll things that I nearly die of laughter."

Bussy continued his way, and stood in front of Henri, whom he was about to salute, when the king said,—

"Do you not hear, Monsieur de Bussy ? You are being called," and amid the shouts of laughter from his favorites, he turned his back on the young captain.

Bussy reddened with anger, but restraining his first impulse, he affected to take the king's remark seriously. Without seeming to have heard the laughter of Quélus, Schomberg, and Maugiron, without seeming to have noticed their insolent smiles, he turned towards Chicot.

"Ah, pardon me, sire," he said, "there are kings who so greatly resemble jesters that I hope you will excuse me for having taken your jester for a king."

"Hey !" murmured Henri, turning round, "what does he say ?"

"Nothing, sire," said Saint-Luc, who seemed, that evening, to have received from Heaven the mission of peace-maker ; "nothing, absolutely nothing."

"No matter, Maître Bussy," said Chicot, rising on his toes to imitate the king when the latter wished to look majestic, "it is unpardonable."

"Sire," answered Bussy, "forgive me ; I was pre-occupied."

"With your pages, monsieur ?" said Chicot, in an ill-tempered tone ; "you are ruining yourself in pages, and,

par la mordieu ! that is encroaching upon our prerogatives."

" How so ? " said Bussy, who understood that by humoring the jester the king would be humiliated. " I beg your Majesty to explain ; and if I am really in the wrong—well, I will humbly acknowledge it."

" Cloth of gold, for those clowns ! " said Chicot, pointing to the pages, " while you, a gentleman, a colonel, a Clermont, almost a prince, wear simple black velvet ! "

" Sire," said Bussy, turning towards the king's favorites, " as we live in a time when clowns dress like princes, I think it good taste for princes to dress like clowns, to make a difference."

And he returned to the magnificently attired favorites the impertinent smile they had shortly before bestowed on him.

Henri saw his friends grow pale with rage, and seem only to await his permission to throw themselves on Bussy. Quélus, the most animated of all against this gentleman, with whom he would already have fought, had not the king forbidden it, put his hand to his sword.

" Do you say this for me, and mine ? " cried Chicot, who, having usurped the king's place, answered as Henri should have done.

As he said these words, the jester assumed such an exaggerated position that half of the guests burst out laughing. The other half did not laugh for a very simple reason ; the half that laughed, laughed at the other half.

However, three of Bussy's friends, supposing there might be some altercation, came and stood beside him. They were Charles Balzac d'Entragues, usually called Antraguet, François d'Audie, Vicomte de Ribeirac, and Livarot.

On seeing these hostile preliminaries, Saint-Luc guessed that Bussy had been sent by Monsieur, to bring about some quarrel, and openly defy them. He trembled more than ever ; he felt himself placed between the angers of his two powerful enemies, who chose his house as their battle-field.

He ran to Quélus, who seemed the most animated of all, and laying his hand on the hilt of the young man's sword :

" In the name of Heaven ! " he said to him, " moderate yourself, my friend, and let us wait."

" *Hé ! parbleu !* moderate your own self," he cried. " That blockhead's blow strikes you, as well as me. Whoever says anything against one of us, says it against us all ; and whoever says something against us all, touches the king."

" Quélus, Quélus," said Saint-Luc, " think of the Duc d'Anjou, who is behind Bussy,—all the more watchful because he is absent, all the more to be feared because he is invisible. I hope you don't insult me by believing that I fear the servant ; I only fear the master."

" Eh, *mordieu !*" cried Quélus, " what need we fear when we belong to the King of France ? If we imperil ourselves for him, the King of France will defend us."

" You, yes ; but me ! " piteously said Saint-Luc.

" Ah, well ! " said Quélus, " why the devil did you get married, knowing how jealous the king is in his friendships ? "

" Good ! " said Saint-Luc to himself, " each one thinks of himself,—let us not forget this ; and since I wish to live in peace, at least during the first fortnight of my marriage, let us try and make a friend of M. d'Anjou."

Thereupon he left Quélus and went to meet Bussy.

After his impudent speech, Bussy had raised his head and looked around, trying to hear any impudent reply to his own words. But all heads were turned, all lips were silent ; some feared to approve before the king, others feared to blame before Bussy.

The latter, seeing Saint-Luc approach, thought he had found what he sought.

" Monsieur," said Bussy, " am I indebted to the words I have just spoken for the honor of the conversation you seem to desire ? "

" To the words you have just spoken ? " asked Saint-Luc, with his most gracious smile. " What have you just said ? I heard nothing. No, I saw you, and wished

to have the pleasure of saluting you, and thanking you at the same time for the honor you have conferred on me by your presence in my house."

Bussy was a superior man in all things ; brave unto madness, but cultivated, witty, and well-bred. He knew the courage of Saint-Luc, and understood that his duties as host were paramount to his sensitiveness on the point of honor. To any other, he would have repeated his words,—that is, his insult ; but he bowed politely to Saint-Luc, and replied to his compliment by a few gracious words.

" Oh, oh ! " said Henri, seeing Saint-Luc near Bussy. " I am afraid my young scapegrace is seeking a quarrel with that bully. He is right, but I do not wish him killed. Go and see, Quélus. No, not you, Quélus, you are too hot-headed. Go, Maugiron."

Saint-Luc, however, did not let him come near Bussy, but returned with him to the king.

" What were you saying to that coxcomb, Bussy ? " inquired Henri.

" I, sire ? "

" Yes, you."

" I said ' good-evening,' " replied Saint-Luc.

" Ah, ah ! was that all ? " growled the king.

Saint-Luc perceived that he had made a blunder.

" I said ' good-evening,' " he repeated, " and I added that I would have the honor of saying ' good-morning,' to-morrow."

" I thought as much," said Henri ; " head-strong fellow ! "

" But will your gracious Majesty keep my secret ? " added Saint-Luc, affecting to speak in a low voice.

" Oh, *pardieu* ! " said Henri III., " I don't wish my words to interfere. It is certain that if you could rid me of him without injury to yourself—"

The favorites exchanged a rapid glance, which Henri III. pretended not to notice.

" Because," continued the king, " the fellow is too insolent."

"Yes, yes," said Saint-Luc. "However, the day will come, sire, and be assured he will find his master."

"Eh!" said the king, shaking his head up and down, "the rascal is a famous swordsman. Why is he not bitten by some mad dog? That would rid us of him more easily."

He looked askance at Bussy, who, accompanied by his three friends, walked to and fro, jostling and jeering at those he knew to be most hostile to the Duc d'Anjou, and, therefore, friends of the king.

"Corbleu!" cried Chicot, "don't be so rude to my gentle friends, Maître Bussy; king though I am, I fight with my sword, neither more nor less than if I were a simple jester."

"Ah, the scamp!" murmured Henri; "upon my word, he sees things as they are."

"If he continue such jests, I shall chastise Chicot, sire," said Maugiron.

"Do not attempt it, Maugiron. Chicot is a gentleman, and very sensitive on all questions of honor; besides, he is not most deserving of punishment, for he was not the most insolent."

This time there could be no mistake. Quélus made a sign to D'O and D'Epernon, who, otherwise engaged, had taken no notice of what was going on.

"Gentlemen," said Quélus, taking them to one side, "join the council; you, Saint-Luc, talk to the king, and finish your reconciliation which seems so happily begun."

Saint-Luc preferred the latter duty, and approached the king, who was quarrelling with Chicot.

During this time, Quélus drew his four friends into a window recess.

"Well," inquired D'Epernon, "what have you to say? I was making love to the wife of Joyeuse, and I warn you that if your news is not most interesting, I shall not forgive you."

"I wish to tell you, gentlemen," answered Quélus, "that after the ball I set off immediately for the chase."

"Well," said D'O, "for what chase?"

“ That of the wild boar.”

“ What sudden whim has seized you, to go in this cold weather, and be killed in some thicket ? ”

“ No matter, I am going.”

“ Alone ? ”

“ No, with Maugiron and Schomberg. We hunt for the king.”

“ Ah, yes ! I understand,” said Schomberg and Maugiron together.

“ The king wishes a boar’s head for breakfast to-morrow.”

“ With the collar arranged *à l’Italienne*,” said Maugiron, alluding to the simple turned-down collar worn by Bussy, in contrast with the ruffs of the favorites.

“ Ah, ah ! ” said D’Epernon, “ very well, I am with you.”

“ What is it all about ? ” asked D’O ; “ I don’t understand.”

“ Well, look around you, my friend.”

“ Well, I am looking.”

“ Is there any one who has laughed in your face ? ”

“ Bussy, it seems to me.”

“ Well, is he not a wild boar whose head would be agreeable to the king ? ”

“ You think that the king— ” said D’O.

“ He asks for it,” answered Quélus.

“ Very well, then, let us hunt ; but how shall we hunt ? ”

“ In ambush ; it is the surest way.”

Bussy noticed the conference, and not doubting that he himself was the subject, laughingly approached with his friends.

“ Look, Antraguet ! Look, Ribeirac ! ” he said, “ How they are grouped ! It is most touching. One might take them for Euryalus and Nisus, Damon and Pythias, Castor and— But where is Pollux ? ”

“ Pollux is getting married,” said Antraguet, “ so Castor is left without a mate.”

“ What can they be doing ? ” said Bussy, looking at them insolently.

" I wager they are inventing some new starch."

" No, gentlemen," said Quélus, smiling, " we are talking of the chase."

" Really, my lord Cupid," said Bussy, " it is very cold to go hunting. Your skin will be chapped."

" Monsieur," replied Maugiron, with the same politeness, " we have very warm gloves, and our doublets are lined with fur."

" Ah, that reassures me," said Bussy, " do you hunt very soon ? "

" Perhaps to-night," said Schomberg.

" There is no ' perhaps,' it is positively to-night," added Maugiron.

" In that case, I must warn the king," said Bussy. " What will his Majesty say if to-morrow all his friends have taken cold ? "

" Do not take the trouble to inform the king, monsieur," said Quélus; " his Majesty knows that we will hunt."

" The lark ? " queried Bussy, in the most impudent tone.

" No, monsieur," said Quélus, " we hunt the boar. We must have a head."

" And the animal ? " asked Antraguet.

" Has been scented," said Schomberg.

" Still, you must know where it will pass," said Livarot.

" We shall try to get information," said D'O. " Do you hunt with us, Monsieur de Bussy ? "

" No," said the latter, continuing the conversation in the same tone,— " no, I am really unable. To-morrow I must be at the Duc d'Anjou's for the reception of M. de Monsoreau, whom Monseigneur has just had appointed master of the hounds."

" But to-night ? " asked Quélus.

" Ah, to-night I am unable. I have an appointment in a mysterious house of the Faubourg Saint-Antoine."

" Ah, ah ! " said D'Epernon, " is Queen Margot in Paris, *incognito*, Monsieur de Bussy ? for we heard that you had inherited from La Mole."

"Yes; but I renounced the inheritance some time ago. This is another person."

"And this person expects you, Rue du Faubourg Saint-Antoine?" asked D'O.

"Exactly; I shall even ask your advice, Monsieur de Quélus."

"Speak; although I am no lawyer, I pride myself on giving good advice, particularly to my friends."

"They say that the streets of Paris are unsafe; the Faubourg Saint-Antoine is a very lonely quarter. Which way would you advise me to go there?"

"Well," said Quélus, "as the ferryman of the Louvre will doubtless spend his night waiting for us, in your place, monsieur, I would take the little ferry-boat of the Pré-aux-Clercs; I would get out at the corner tower, follow the quay as far as the Grand Châtelet, and then through the Rue de la Tixeranderie, to the Faubourg Saint-Antoine. Once at the end of the Rue Saint-Antoine, if you pass the Hôtel des Tournelles without accident, you will probably reach in safety the mysterious house of which you spoke just now."

"Many thanks for your indications, Monsieur de Quélus," said Bussy. "You said the ferry-boat of the Pré-aux-Clercs, the corner tower, the quay, as far as the Grand Châtelet, the Rue de la Tixeranderie, and the Rue Saint-Antoine. Be assured that I shall not change one line."

And bowing to the five friends, he withdrew, saying aloud to Balzac d'Entragues:—

"Positively, Antraguet, there is nothing to be done with those people; let us go."

Livarot and Ribeirac began to laugh, following Bussy and D'Entragues, who withdrew, but who, as they did so, turned around several times.

The favorites remained perfectly calm. They seemed to have made up their minds to understand nothing.

As Bussy was crossing the last *salon*, in which stood Madame de Saint-Luc, who did not lose sight of her husband, Saint-Luc made her a sign, indicating by a

glance the Duc d'Anjou's favorite, who was preparing to leave. Jeanne understood at once, with that promptness which is the special gift of women, and running to the gentleman, she stopped him.

"Oh, Monsieur de Bussy," she said, "every one is talking of a sonnet you have made."

"Against the king, madame?" asked Bussy.

"No, in honor of the queen. Do repeat it to me."

"Most willingly," said Bussy; and offering his arm to Madame de Saint-Luc, he went off, repeating the desired sonnet.

During this time, Saint-Luc softly joined his friends, and heard Quélus saying,—

"The animal will not be difficult to follow with such tracks; therefore, at the corner of the Hôtel des Tournelles, near the Porte Saint-Antoine, opposite the Hôtel Saint-Pol."

"Each with a lackey?" asked D'Epernon.

"Not at all, Nogaret, not at all," said Quélus. "Let us be alone, know our secret alone, and do the work alone. I hate him, but I should be ashamed to allow a lackey to touch him; he is too much of a gentleman."

"Shall we go out all six together?" asked Maugiron.

"All five, but not all six," said Saint-Luc.

"Ah, true!" said Schomberg; "we forgot that you had taken unto yourself a wife, and still treated you as a bachelor."

"In fact," said D'O, "it is only just that poor Saint-Luc should remain with his wife on his wedding-night."

"You are mistaken, gentlemen," said Saint-Luc, "it is not my wife who keeps me, though you must admit that she is well worth my staying; it is the king."

"How! the king?"

"Yes, his Majesty wishes me to return with him to the Louvre."

The young men looked at each other with a smile that Saint-Luc tried in vain to fathom.

"What would you have?" said Quélus. "The king

is so marvellously fond of you that he cannot do without you."

"Besides," added Schomberg, "we have no need of Saint-Luc. Let us leave him to his king and to his wife."

"Eh! the beast is heavy," said D'Epernon.

"Pshaw!" said Quélus. "Let me face him with a boar-spear, and I will settle the matter."

Henri's voice was heard, calling Saint-Luc.

"Gentlemen," said the latter, "the king is calling me. Good luck to you, and *au revoir*."

He left them immediately; but instead of going to the king, he glided near the walls, through the rooms, still filled with spectators and dancers, and reached the door, near which stood Bussy, still conversing with the fair hostess, who was doing her best not to let him escape.

"Ah, good evening, Monsieur de Saint-Luc," said the young man. "How frightened you look! Do you take part in the great hunt that is being organized? It would be a proof of your courage, but not of your gallantry."

"Monsieur," answered Saint-Luc, "I looked frightened because I was seeking you."

"Ah, really?"

"And I was afraid you had gone. Dear Jeanne," he added, "tell your father to try and stop the king. I must exchange a few words in private with M. de Bussy."

Jeanne hastened away, not understanding these necessities, but submitting to them because she felt them to be important.

"What have you to say to me, Monsieur de Saint-Luc?" asked Bussy.

"I wish to tell you, Monsieur le Comte," answered Saint-Luc, "that if you have any appointment for to-night you had best postpone it until to-morrow, because the streets of Paris are unsafe; and if, perchance, this appointment should take you in the vicinity of the Bastille, you would do well to avoid the Hôtel des Tournelles, where there is a corner in which several men could easily conceal themselves. This is what I had to tell you, Monsieur de Bussy. Heaven preserve me from

thinking that a man like you could know fear—only reflect."

At this moment Chicot's voice was heard crying out :—

" Saint-Luc, my dear Saint-Luc ! Do not hide yourself that way. You see I am waiting for you to return to the Louvre."

Near the jester stood Henri III., to whom one page was already handing the heavy ermine-lined cloak, while another held thick gloves, reaching to the elbow, and a third the velvet mask lined with satin.

" Sire," said Saint-Luc, addressing the two Henris at the same time, " I shall have the honor of lighting you to your litters."

" Not at all," said Henri. " Chicot goes his way, and I go mine. My friends are all worthless scamps who let me return alone to the Louvre, while they go in search of adventures. I had counted on them, and they have failed me ; now, you cannot let me go home in this way. You are a sober, married man, and must take me back to the queen. Come, my friend, come. Hey there ! a horse for Monsieur de Saint-Luc.—No, it is useless," he added, changing his mind. " My litter is wide ; there is room for two."

Jeanne de Brissac had not lost one word of this conversation ; she wished to speak, to say a word to her husband, to tell her father that the king was carrying Saint-Luc away, but the latter placed his finger to his lips, warning her to be silent and circumspect.

" *Peste !*" he said in a low tone, " now that I am on good terms with François d'Anjou, let us not quarrel with Henri de Valois.—Sire," he added aloud, " I am here, and so devoted to your Majesty that I would go to the end of the world if you commanded me."

There was a great tumult, grand salutations, then complete silence to hear the king's leave-taking of Mademoiselle de Brissac and her father. His words were charming.

Then the horses pranced in the courtyard, the torches threw their red light on the windows. Finally, all the

courtiers of royalty and all the wedding-guests disappeared, half-laughing, half-shivering, in the dusky shadow.

Jeanne, left alone with her women, entered her chamber and knelt before the image of a saint in whom she had great faith. Then she gave orders that she should be left alone, and that a repast should be prepared for her husband.

M. de Brissac did more ; he sent six guards to await the young bridegroom at the gate of the Louvre and escort him home. But two hours later, the guards sent one of their companions to inform the marshal that all the doors of the Louvre were closed, and that before shutting the last, the captain of the watch had said,—

“ It is useless to wait any longer ; no one will leave the Louvre to-night. His Majesty is in bed, and every one is asleep.”

The marshal carried this news to his daughter, who answered that she was too anxious to go to bed, but would sit up and wait for her husband.

CHAPTER II.

HOW IT IS NOT ALWAYS THE ONE WHO OPENS THE DOOR WHO ENTERS THE HOUSE.

THE Porte Saint-Antoine was a kind of stone arch, almost similar to our present Porte Saint-Denis and Porte Saint-Martin, only it was connected on the left with the buildings adjacent to the Bastille, and was thus attached to the old fortress.

The space to the right, between the gate and the Hôtel de Bretagne, was wide, dark, and muddy. This space was little frequented by day, and quite deserted after night-fall, for all the nocturnal passers-by seemed to have made a sort of path near the fortress, to place themselves in some way, at a time when the streets were dens of thieves,

and the watch was practically unknown, under the protection of the donjon sentinel, who could be of no assistance beyond that of calling for help, and thus frightening malefactors away.

Of course, on winter nights the passers-by were even more prudent than on summer nights.

The night during which took place the events we have already related, and those that are about to follow, was so cold, so black, and so cloudy, that no one could have perceived between the battlements of the fortress the sentinel, who was equally unable to distinguish any one passing on the square below.

Before the Porte Saint-Antoine, on the side towards the city, there were no houses, only tall walls. These walls belonged on the right to the Church of Saint-Paul, and on the left to the *Hôtel des Tournelles*. At the end of this *hôtel*, near the Rue Saint-Catherine, the wall formed the recess of which Saint-Luc had spoken to Bussy.

Then came the block of houses situated between the Rue de Jouy and the great Rue Saint-Antoine, into which opened at this time the Rue des Billettes, and Saint-Catherine's Church.

Moreover, there were no lights in this old part of Paris we have just described. On nights when the moon illuminated the earth, the gigantic Bastille towered dark, majestic and motionless, strongly outlined against the starry azure of the heavens ; but on dark nights, the place where it stood was only marked by a deeper gloom, in which flickered, here and there, the pale lights from some windows.

On this night, which had begun with a sharp frost and which was to finish with a heavy snow-storm, no passer-by walked over the frozen ground of the sort of road-way leading from the street to the *faubourg*, and always selected by belated wayfarers. However, a practised eye might have detected, in that angle of the wall of the *Tournelles*, several black shadows which moved enough to show that they belonged to poor devils with human bodies who seemed to find great difficulty in retaining the

natural warmth, which diminished with every minute, on account of the motionless position to which they seemed to have voluntarily condemned themselves in the expectation of some event.

The sentinel of the tower, unable to see through the darkness, could not hear more distinctly ; these shadows conversed in almost inaudible tones, yet their conversation was not devoid of a certain interest.

“ That devil of a Bussy was right,” said one of the shadows. “ This is a night such as we had at Warsaw, when King Henri was King of Poland ; and if this continues, our skins will crack, as he predicted.”

“ Come, come, Maugiron, you complain like a woman,” answered another voice. “ It is not warm, I admit ; but pull your cloak over your eyes, put your hands in your pockets, and you will not feel the cold.”

“ Really, Schomberg,” said a third shadow, “ you may talk, and any one would know you were a German. As for me, my lips are bleeding, and my moustache is stiff with icicles.”

“ It is my hands,” said a fourth. “ Upon my word, I would wager I had none.”

“ Why did you not borrow your mamma’s muff, my poor Quélus ? ” answered Schomberg. “ The good woman would have lent it to you, particularly if you had told her we were to get rid of that dear Bussy, whom she loves so fondly.”

“ Eh, *mon Dieu !* have patience,” said a fifth voice. “ I am sure you will soon be complaining of being too warm.”

“ May Heaven hear you, D’Epernon,” said Maugiron, stamping his feet.

“ I did not speak,” said D’Epernon, “ it was D’O. I am silent because I am afraid my words will freeze.”

“ What were you saying ? ” asked Quélus of Maugiron.

“ D’O was saying,” replied Maugiron, “ that we would soon be too warm, and I answered, ‘ May heaven hear you ! ’ ”

“ Well, I think we are heard. Do I not see something coming through the Rue Saint-Paul ? ”

"Wrong; it cannot be he."

"Why so?"

"Because he named another route."

"He may have suspected something, and changed his route."

"You do not know Bussy; where he said he will pass, he will pass, even though he knew the devil himself were lying in wait to bar the way."

"In the meantime," said Quélus, "here come two men."

"Why, yes," repeated two or three voices, recognizing the truth of the assertion.

"In this case, let us attack."

"One moment," said D'Epernon; "let us not kill honest citizens or worthy women. Look! they stop."

In fact, at the end of the Rue Saint-Paul, which opens on the Rue Saint-Antoine, the two persons who attracted the attention of the five companions had stopped, as if in uncertainty.

"Oh, oh!" said Quélus, "can they have seen us?"

"How could they, when we can hardly see each other?"

"You are right," said Quélus. "Look! they are turning to the left, they are stopping before a house. They are looking around."

"Yes, they are."

"I think they mean to go in. Eh! one moment. They may be trying to escape us!"

"But it is not he, since he was to go to the Faubourg Saint-Antoine, and these, having come out near Saint-Paul, go down the street," answered Maugiron.

"Eh!" said Schomberg, "who tells you that the cunning fellow did not give you a false indication, either purposely or by accident?"

"After all, that might be," said Quélus.

This supposition made the troupe of gentlemen bound like a pack of famished hounds. They left their retreat, and rushed with drawn swords against the two men standing in front of the door.

One of the men had just introduced a key into the lock; the door had yielded, and was beginning to open, when

the noise of their assailants made the two mysterious personages look up.

"What is this?" asked the smaller of the two companions. "Do you think it is against us, D'Aurilly?"

"Ah, monseigneur," replied the one who had just opened the door, "it looks like it. Will you name yourself, or remain *incognito*?"

"Armed men! an ambush!"

"Some jealous lover watching us. *Vrai Dieu!* I told you, monseigneur, that the lady was too beautiful not to be courted."

"Let us enter quickly, Aurilly. A siege is better resisted within than without a door."

"Yes, monseigneur, when there are no enemies in the citadel. But who tells you—?"

He had not time to finish. The young men had traversed that distance of a hundred paces with the rapidity of lightning. Quélus and Maugiron, who had followed the wall, threw themselves between the door and those who wished to enter, in order to cut off their retreat, while Schomberg, D'O, and D'Epernon attacked.

"To death! to death!" cried Quélus, who was the most fiery of the band.

Suddenly, the one who had been called Monseigneur, and who had not told his companion whether he would remain *incognito*, turned towards Quélus, and proudly folding his arms:

"I think you cried 'to death!' in speaking to a son of France, Monsieur de Quélus," he said in a sharp tone while his eyes flashed.

"Monseigneur le Duc d'Anjou!" he cried.

"Monseigneur le Duc d'Anjou!" repeated the others.

"Well!" said François in a threatening tone. "Do we still say, 'To death! to death!' gentlemen?"

"Monseigneur," stammered D'Epernon, "it was a jest; forgive us."

"Monseigneur," replied D'O, in turn, "we did not dream of meeting your Highness in this deserted corner of Paris."

“A jest!” said the duke, without even honoring D’O with a reply; “you have singular ways of jesting, Monsieur d’Epernon. Since it was not intended for me, for whom was your jest?”

“Monseigneur,” respectfully answered Schomberg, “we saw Saint-Luc leave the Hôtel de Montmorency and come this way. We thought it very odd, and wished to know why he left his wife on his wedding-night.”

The excuse was plausible, for in all probability the Duc d’Anjou would hear the next day that Saint-Luc had not slept at the Hôtel de Montmorency, and that news would coincide with what Schomberg had just said.

“Monsieur de Saint-Luc? You took me for Monsieur de Saint-Luc, gentlemen?”

“Yes, monseigneur,” simultaneously replied the five companions.

“And since when can we be mistaken for each other?” said Monsieur d’Anjou. “M. de Saint-Luc is a head taller than I am.”

“That is true, monseigneur,” said Quélus; “but he is just the same height as M. d’Aurilly, who has the honor of accompanying you.”

“Besides, the night is very dark, monseigneur,” replied Maugiron.

“And seeing a man put a key in the lock, we took him for the principal one of the two,” murmured D’O.

“Monseigneur,” said Quélus, “do not suppose that we had the shadow of an evil thought towards you, not even that of disturbing your pleasures.”

While speaking and listening to the more or less logical answers, prompted by astonishment or fear, François, by a skilful strategic manoeuvre, had left the threshold of the door, and closely followed by his lute-player, D’Aurilly, the usual companion of his nocturnal rambles, had already moved so far from the door that it could not be distinguished from those near it.

“My pleasures?” he said sharply. “What makes you think I take my pleasures here?”

“Ah, monseigneur, in any case, and whatever the pur-

poses for which you came," replied Quélus, " pardon us, and let us retire."

" Very well ; adieu, gentlemen."

" Monseigneur," added D'Epernon, " our discretion is well known to your Highness—"

The Duc d'Anjou, who had already retreated one step, stopped and frowned.

" Discretion, Monsieur de Nogaret,—did I ask for any, pray tell me ? "

" Monseigneur, we supposed that your Highness, alone at this hour, and followed by your confidant—"

" You were mistaken. This is what you must believe—what I wish to have believed."

The five gentlemen listened in the deepest and most respectful silence.

" I was going," slowly resumed the Duc d'Anjou, as though he wished to engrave every word on the memory of his listeners—" I was going to consult the Jew Manssès, who can read the future in glass and in coffee dregs. He lives, as you know, Rue de la Tournelle. In passing, D'Aurilly perceived you, and took you for some archers going the rounds. Therefore," he added with a sort of gayety very frightening for those who knew the prince, " being true consultors of sorcerers, we went along the walls to escape your terrible glances, if possible."

While speaking thus, the prince had gradually returned to the Rue Saint-Paul, and was within calling distance of the sentinels of the Bastille, in case of an attack ; he was not quite reassured on that point. In spite of their excuses and respects, he knew the secret and inveterate hatred cherished against him by Henri III.'s favorites.

" And now that you know what to believe, and, more particularly, what to say, adieu, gentlemen. It is useless to add that I do not wish to be followed."

All bowed and took leave of the prince, who turned several times to look at them while he himself took a few steps in the opposite direction.

" Monseigneur," said D'Aurilly, " I would wager those

men had evil designs. It is near midnight ; we are, as they said, in a lonely quarter. Let us return quickly to the Hôtel. Monseigneur, let us return."

"Not at all," said the prince, stopping ; "let us, on the contrary, take advantage of their departure."

"Your Highness is mistaken," said D'Aurilly ; "they have not disappeared in the least. They have returned to their hiding-place, as Monseigneur can see for himself ; do you see them, monseigneur,—there in the hollow at the corner of the Hôtel des Tournelles ?"

François looked. D'Aurilly had spoken the exact truth. The five gentlemen had in fact resumed their position, and they evidently meditated some project interrupted by the arrival of the prince ; perhaps they had taken this position only to watch the duke and his companion, and see if they were really going to the Jew Manassès.

"Well, monseigneur," asked D'Aurilly, "what have you decided ? I will do whatever your Highness orders, but I do not think it would be wise to remain."

"*Mordieu !*" said the prince, "it is very annoying to give up."

"Yes, I know, monseigneur ; but the pleasure may be postponed. I have already had the honor of telling your Highness that I have gained information ; the house is rented for one year ; we know that the lady's room is on the first story ; we have bribed her maid, and have a key that opens her door. With all these advantages, we can wait."

"You are sure that the door yielded ?"

"Yes, I am sure, when I tried the third key."

"By the way, did you close it ?"

"The door ?"

"Yes."

"Certainly, monseigneur."

However forcibly D'Aurilly had made this statement, we must say that he was less sure of having closed the door than of having opened it ; but his assurance satisfied the prince on both points.

“ However,” said the latter, “ I should have liked to see for myself—”

“ What they are doing there, monseigneur ? I can tell you with no fear of error ; they are lying in wait for some one. Let us go. Your Highness has enemies ; who knows what they might not attempt ? ”

“ Very well, I consent ; let us go, but we shall return.”

“ Not to-night, at all events, monseigneur. Your Highness should appreciate my fears ; I see snares at every step, and surely I may feel some terror, when I accompany the first prince of the royal family,—the heir to the crown, whom so many people wish to deprive of his inheritance.”

These last words made so much impression on François that he immediately decided to retire, still he did not do so without raging against this meeting, and mentally registering the promise to repay the five gentlemen on some suitable occasion.

“ Very well, let us return to the *hôtel* ; we shall find Bussy, who must be back from that cursed wedding. He will have picked up some good quarrel, and killed or prepared to kill some of those favorite weaklings, and that will console me.”

“ Come, monseigneur,” said D’Aurilly, “ let us have hope in Bussy. I ask for nothing better ; and in this particular I have, like your Highness, great confidence in him.”

They went.

They had scarcely turned the corner of the Rue de Jouy when our five companions saw, at the end of the Rue Tison, a horseman, enveloped in a large cloak, make his appearance. The firm step of the horse resounded on the almost petrified soil, and a feeble ray of moonlight, struggling through the dense snow clouds, tipped with silver the white plume of his cap. He reined in and cautiously restrained his impatient steed, who foamed at being thus held in check.

“ This time,” said Quélus, “ it is he.”

“ Impossible ! ” said Maugiron.

" Why so ? "

" Because he is alone, and we left him with Livarot, D'Entragues, and Ribeirac, who would not have let him run such a risk."

" It is he, nevertheless ; it is he," said D'Epernon. " Look ! do you not recognize his sonorous hum, and his insolent way of carrying his head ? "

" Then," said D'O, " it is a snare."

" At all events, snare or no, it is he ; and as it is he, to arms ! "

It was indeed Bussy who came carelessly through the Rue Saint-Antoine, and followed exactly the route indicated by Quélus ; he had, as we have seen, received Saint-Luc's warning, and notwithstanding the natural thrill produced by these words, he had taken leave of his three friends at the door of the Hôtel de Montmorency.

This was one of the bravadoes in which the valiant colonel delighted, and he said of himself : " I am but a simple gentleman, but in my breast beats the heart of an emperor ; and when I read, in Plutarch's Lives, the exploits of the ancient Romans, I do not think there is a single hero of antiquity whom I could not imitate in all that he has done."

And besides, Bussy had thought that perhaps Saint-Luc, whom he did not usually count among his friends, and whose unexpected interest was only due to the perplexed situation in which he, Saint-Luc, found himself, had only warned him of the danger to persuade him to take precautions which might render him ridiculous in the eyes of his adversaries, supposing he had adversaries waiting for him. Now, Bussy dreaded ridicule more than danger. He had, even in the eyes of his enemies, a reputation for courage, which could only be sustained on the same level by engaging in the rashest adventures. Therefore, like one of Plutarch's men, he had dismissed his three companions, a vigorous escort, that would have obtained for him the same respect as a squadron ; and alone, his arms folded under his cloak, with no other weapons than his sword and his dagger, he advanced towards the house

where awaited him, not a mistress, as one might have thought, but a letter, sent to him each month, on the same day, by the Queen of Navarre, in memory of their good friendship, and which the brave gentleman, faithful to the promise he had made to his beautiful Marguerite, and which he had never broken, went to fetch, at night, alone and unattended, from the dwelling of the messenger.

He had passed with impunity from the Rue des Grands-Augustins to the Rue Saint-Antoine, when at the Rue Sainte-Catherine his bright and piercing eye distinguished in the darkness, near the wall, those human forms which the Duc d'Anjou, less warned, had not perceived at first. There is, moreover, in a truly brave heart, at the approach of danger, a feeling of exaltation which carries the physical and mental faculties to their highest point of perfection.

Bussy counted the black shadows on the gray wall.

"Three, four, five," he said, "without counting the lackeys, who are doubtless in another corner, and will come at the first call from their masters. It seems I am much thought of. The devil ! here is a good deal of work for one man. Come, come ! that brave Saint-Luc did not deceive me ; and even were his the first sword to pierce me, I would say, 'Thanks for the warning, friend.'"

So saying, he still advanced ; only his right arm moved freely under the cloak, the clasp of which his left hand had unfastened without apparent movement.

It was then that Schomberg cried, "To arms !" and this cry was repeated by his four companions as they all sprang forward to meet Bussy.

"Ah, gentlemen," said Bussy, in a sharp but steady voice, "it seems you wish to kill poor Bussy. I am a wild beast, the famous boar you were going to hunt ? Well, gentlemen, the boar will rip up a few of you, I swear it !—and you know that I always keep my word."

"Perhaps," said Schomberg, "but none the less you show very bad manners, M. Bussy d'Amboise, by speaking to us on horseback, while we listen on foot."

As he said these words, the young man's arm, covered with white satin, came from beneath his cloak like a

silver flash in the moonlight, and though Bussy could not guess with what object, yet he understood that this gesture contained some threat.

He was about to reply as Bussy usually replied, and was on the point of spurring his horse, when he felt the animal give way under him. Schomberg, with that peculiar skill he had already shown in several encounters, young as he was, had thrown a sort of a cutlass, the blade of which was heavier than the handle, and the weapon, in cutting the horse's leg, had remained in the wound, like the axe in an oak-tree.

The animal neighed feebly, and fell on its knees.

Bussy, always prepared for everything, stood on both feet, sword in hand.

"Ah, wretch!" he cried, "it was my favorite horse: you shall pay for this!"

And as Schomberg approached, carried away by his courage and miscalculating the range of the sword that Bussy held at his side, as one miscalculates the range of a coiled snake's fang, this sword and arm were suddenly extended and wounded him in the thigh.

Schomberg uttered a cry.

"Well!" said Bussy, "do I keep my word? One already disposed of. It was Bussy's wrist, and not his horse's leg, that you should have cut."

In a flash, while Schomberg bound up his thigh with his handkerchief, Bussy presented the point of his sword to the face, and to the breast of his four other assailants, scorning to call; asking for help was admitting that he needed it, and was unworthy of Bussy. However, rolling his cloak around his left arm, to be used as a shield, he gradually retreated, not to fly, but to reach a wall against which he could lean, and prevent his being attacked from behind. He struck ten blows a minute, and felt sometimes that soft resistance of the flesh, which indicated that his blows had taken effect; once he slipped, and instinctively looked to the ground. This instant sufficed for Quélus to wound him in the side.

"Touched!" cried Quélus.

"Yes, in the doublet," answered Bussy, who would not even acknowledge his wound ; "those are the thrusts of men who are afraid."

And springing upon Quélus, he plied him so vigorously that the young man's sword flew ten paces from his hand. But he could not pursue his advantage ; at the same instant D'O, D'Epernon, and Maugiron attacked him with increasing fury. Schomberg had bound his wound, Quélus had picked up his sword ; he understood that he would be surrounded, that he had but one minute to reach the wall, and that if he did not take advantage of this minute, he was lost.

Bussy jumped backwards, putting a distance of three paces between himself and his assailants. The four swords soon closed around him, but it was too late. In another bound Bussy had reached the wall. There he stopped, strong as Achilles or Roland, and smiling at the tempest of blows that rained on his head or clashed around him.

All at once his brow grew damp, and a cloud passed before his eyes.

He had forgotten his wound, but these symptoms of faintness he had just felt recalled it to his mind.

"Ah, you weaken !" cried Quélus, redoubling his blows.

"Here," said Bussy, "judge for yourself !"

And with the hilt of his sword he struck him on the temple. Quélus fell under the blow.

Then wild, furious as the boar, who having resisted the dogs now rushes on them, he uttered a terrible cry and rushed forward. D'O and D'Epernon drew back ; Maugiron had raised Quélus and held him in his arms. Bussy broke the latter's sword with his foot, and wounded D'Epernon in the right arm. For one instant he was victorious ; but Quélus recovered consciousness, Schomberg, wounded though he was, returned to the attack, four swords flashed again. For the second time Bussy felt himself lost. He summoned all his strength to effect his retreat, and moved backward step by step to return

to his wall. Already the cold perspiration on his brow, the ringing in his ears, and the mist before his eyes warned him that his strength was failing. His sword no longer obeyed his thought. Bussy felt for the wall with his left hand, and the contact of the cold stone did him good, but to his great surprise it yielded,—it was a door slightly ajar.

Then he regained hope and summoned all his strength for this supreme moment. For one second his blows were so rapid and violent that all the swords were drawn back or lowered before him ; then he slipped to the other side of the door, and turning round, closed it with a violent blow from his shoulder. The spring clicked in the lock. All was over ; Bussy was out of danger, he was victorious since he had escaped.

Then, with his eyes dilated with joy, he saw, through the narrow grating of the wicket, the pale faces of his adversaries. He heard them strike furious blows against the wood of the door, he heard their cries of rage and angry calls. Suddenly, the earth seemed to give way beneath his footsteps and the walls to move. He took three steps forward, reached a courtyard, staggered, and rolled on the steps of a staircase.

He knew no more, and seemed to descend into the silence and darkness of the grave.

CHAPTER III.

HOW IT IS SOMETIMES DIFFICULT TO DISTINGUISH THE DREAM FROM THE REALITY.

BUSSY, before falling, had had time to slip his handkerchief under his shirt and to buckle his sword-belt above it, so as to make a sort of bandage for the open and burning wound whence the blood escaped like flame ; but he had already lost enough blood to faint, as we have seen.

However, whether life persisted in his brain, excited by

pain and anger, and apparently unconscious, or whether this swoon was followed by a fever and then by a second swoon, here is what Bussy saw, or thought he saw, in that hour of dream or reality, during that instant of twilight placed between the darkness of two nights.

He found himself in a room with carved wood furniture, figured tapestry, and a painted ceiling. These figures in all possible attitudes, holding flowers, carrying lances, seemed to step from the walls on which they moved, to ascend to the ceiling in mysterious ways. Between the two windows was placed the portrait of a woman glowing with light ; only it seemed to Bussy that the frame of this picture was simply the casing of a door. Bussy, motionless, fixed to his bed by a superior power, deprived of all his movements, having lost all his faculties save that of seeing, looked at all these figures with dim eyes, admiring the faint smiles of those that carried the flowers and the grotesque anger of those carrying the swords. Had he already seen these figures, or was he seeing them for the first time ? He could not decide, his head was so heavy.

All at once the woman of the portrait seemed to come out of the frame, and there advanced towards him an adorable creature, clad in a long white woollen dress, like that of the angels, with fair hair hanging over her shoulders, with eyes black as jet, under long silken lashes, a skin beneath which one could almost see circulating the blood that tinged it with pink. This woman was so amazingly beautiful, her extended arms were so fascinating, that Bussy made a violent effort to throw himself at her feet ; but he seemed held in his bed by bonds like those which keep the dead in the tomb while the immortal soul, scorning the earth, mounts to heaven.

This compelled him to look at the bed on which he was lying, and it seemed to him one of those magnificent beds carved in the time of Francis I., and to which were suspended curtains of white damask brocaded in gold.

At the sight of this woman the figures on the wall and on the ceiling ceased to occupy Bussy's attention. The lady of the portrait was all to him, and he tried to see if

she left a vacancy in the frame, but an impenetrable cloud floated before that frame and concealed it from him ; then he looked again at the mysterious figure, and concentrating his gaze on the marvellous apparition, he began to address her one of those compliments in verse at which he was such an adept.

But the woman suddenly disappeared. An opaque body interposed itself between her and Bussy. This body walked heavily along, stretching out its arms like a man playing blindman's buff.

Bussy felt his anger rise, and was soon in such a rage against the inopportune visitor that, had his movements been free, he would have attacked him. It is only just to say that he tried, but found it impossible.

While he was vainly attempting to rise from the bed on which he seemed chained, the new-comer spoke.

“ Well,” he said, “ have I arrived at last ? ”

“ Yes, monsieur,” said a voice so sweet that every fibre of Bussy's heart thrilled at the sound ; “ you may now remove your bandage.”

Bussy made an effort to see if the woman with the sweet voice was the same as the one in the frame, but it was useless. He saw before him only the young and pleasant face of a man who, obeying the instructions received, had just removed his bandage, and was looking curiously around the room.

“ The devil take this man ! ” thought Bussy.

And he tried to express his thought by word or gesture, but found it impossible to do either.

“ Ah, I understand now ! ” said the young man, going near the bed ; “ you are wounded, are you not, my dear monsieur ? Come, we shall try to mend you.”

Bussy wished to answer, but he understood it was impossible. His eyes wandered dimly around, and he felt a pricking as of needles run through the extreme ends of his fingers.

“ Is the wound mortal ? ” asked, in a tone of sad and painful interest, which brought the tears to Bussy's eyes, the sweet voice which had already spoken, and which

the wounded man recognized as that of the lady of the portrait.

" I do not yet know, but I shall tell you. In the meanwhile, he has fainted."

This was all that Bussy could understand. He seemed to hear the rustling of a dress passing out of the room ; then he thought he felt something like a red-hot iron going through his side, and lost all consciousness.

In after-times it was impossible for Bussy to fix the length of this swoon. Only when he awoke, a cold wind blew over his face, harsh and discordant voices sounded near him. He opened his eyes to see if the figures on the wall were quarrelling with those on the ceiling ; and hoping that the portrait would still be there, he turned his head in all directions. But there was neither tapestry nor ceiling to be seen. As to the portrait, it had entirely disappeared. Bussy saw on his right only a man dressed in gray, with a white apron spotted with blood and tucked into his belt ; on his left, a monk of Saint-Genevieve supporting his head ; and before him an old woman mumbling prayers.

His wandering eyes soon rested on a mass of stone towering before him ; and going to the very top of this mass, to measure its height, he recognized the Temple, that donjon flanked with walls and towers ; and above the Temple, the cold, white sky, slightly colored by the rising sun.

Bussy was purely and simply in the street, or rather on the edge of a ditch, near the Temple.

" Ah, thank you, good people, for the trouble you took in carrying me hither. I needed air, and they might have given me some by opening the windows, and I should have been better on my bed of white and gold damask than on the naked ground. Never mind, you will find in my pocket,—unless you have already paid yourselves, which would be prudent,—you will find some twenty gold crowns. Take them, my friends, take them ! "

" But, monsieur," said the butcher, " we did not have the trouble of carrying you. You were here,

really here. We found you when we passed by at day-break."

" Oh, the devil ! " said Bussy. " And the young doctor, was he here ? "

The bystanders looked at one another.

" This is the remains of delirium," said the monk, shaking his head. Then turning to Bussy,—

" My son," he said, " I think you would do well to confess."

Bussy looked at the monk in astonishment.

" There was no doctor, poor, dear young man," said the old woman ; " you were here alone, abandoned, cold as death. See, it has snowed a little, and your place is marked in black on the snow ! "

Bussy threw a glance on the side that pained him ; remembered having received a sword-stroke ; slipped his hand under his doublet, and felt his handkerchief in the same place, held over the wound by his sword-belt.

" It is singular ! " he said.

Already profiting by the permission he had given them, the bystanders were dividing the contents of his purse, with many pitiful exclamations at his condition.

" There," he said, when the division was over, " that is very good, my friends. Now take me to my *hôtel*."

" Certainly, certainly, poor, dear young man," said the old woman ; " the butcher is strong, and besides he has his horse on which you can ride."

" Is it true ? " said Bussy.

" It is God's truth," said the butcher ; " my horse and I are at your service, my gentleman."

" Nevertheless, my son," said the monk, " while the butcher is fetching his horse, you would do well to confess."

" What is your name ? " asked Bussy.

" My name is Brother Gorenflot."

" Well, Brother Gorenflot," replied Bussy, sitting up, " I hope the time has not yet come. Therefore, good father, to the most pressing. I am cold, and I should like to be home and warm myself."

“ What is your *hôtel* called ? ”

“ Hôtel de Bussy.”

“ What ! ” cried the bystanders, “ you belong to M. de Bussy ? ”

“ I am M. de Bussy himself ! ”

“ Bussy ! ” they all cried ; “ the lord of Bussy ! the brave Bussy, the scourge of the favorites ! Hurrah for Bussy ! ”

And the young man, lifted on the shoulders of his hearers, was carried in triumph to his *hôtel*, while the monk went away counting his share of the twenty pieces of gold, shaking his head, and muttering,—

“ If it is that braggart Bussy, I am not surprised he refused to confess.”

When he reached his home, Bussy sent for his usual surgeon, who found the wound not dangerous.

“ Tell me,” said Bussy, “ has not that wound been already dressed ? ”

“ Really,” said the doctor, “ I am not sure ; though, after all, it seems very fresh.”

“ Eh ! ” asked Bussy. “ Was it serious enough to make me delirious ? ”

“ Certainly.”

“ The devil ! ” thought Bussy ; “ was that tapestry, with its figures carrying flowers and lances ; that frescoed ceiling ; that carved bedstead hung in white and gold damask ; that portrait between the two windows ; that beautiful blond woman with black eyes ; that doctor playing blindman’s-buff,—was all this delirium ? Is there nothing true but my combat with the favorites ? Where did I fight ? Ah, yes, that is it ! It was near the Bastille, at the Rue Saint-Paul. I leaned against a wall, that wall was a door, that door opened most fortunately ; I closed it with difficulty, and found myself in an alley. There, I remember nothing more until the moment I fainted. Now, did I dream ?—that is the question. Ah !—and my horse ? They must have found my horse dead on the spot. Doctor, pray call some one ! ”

The doctor called a valet.

Bussy inquired, and heard that the animal, bleeding and mutilated, had dragged itself to the door of the *hôtel*, where it had been found neighing at daybreak. The alarm immediately spread through the house; all the servants, who adored their master, had set out to look for him, and the greater number had not yet returned.

"There is only the portrait," said Bussy, "which still remains a dream for me, and it is a dream. How could it be possible for a portrait to step out of its frame and converse with a physician whose eyes are bandaged? I am a fool! And yet, as I remember it, that portrait was very charming. It had—"

Bussy began to recall the details of the portrait, and as he went over them in his memory, a voluptuous thrill—that thrill of love which warms and gladdens the heart—passed like balm over his burning breast.

"And I dreamed all that!" cried Bussy, while the doctor bandaged his wound. "*Mordieu!* it is impossible! No one has such dreams. Let us recapitulate."

And Bussy repeated for the hundredth time,—

"I was at the ball; Saint-Luc warned me that I was expected near the Bastille. I was with Antraguet, Ribeirac, and Livarot. I sent them away. I went by the quay, the Grand Châtelet, etc. At the Hôtel des Tournelles I first perceived the men who were waiting for me. They rushed on me and wounded my horse. We fought famously. I entered an alley; I fainted; *and then*— Ah, there it is! That *and then* kills me. There was fever, delirium, a dream; after which *and then*— And then," he added with a sigh, "I found myself on the edge of the ditch near the Temple, where a monk wished to confess me. No matter, I will satisfy myself on that score," resumed Bussy, after a moment's silence spent in collecting his thoughts. "Doctor, shall I be confined at home for a fortnight for this scratch as I was for the last?"

"That depends. Can you not walk?"

"On the contrary," said Bussy, "I seem to have quicksilver in my legs."

"Take a few steps."

Bussy jumped out of bed, and proved his words by walking briskly around the room.

"That will do," said the doctor, "provided you do not ride on horseback or walk ten leagues the first day."

"Now, you are a doctor!" cried Bussy; "that is capital. Nevertheless, I saw another last night. Ah, yes, I saw him! His face is engraved on my mind; and if ever I meet him I shall surely recognize him."

"I advise you not to seek him," said the physician. "One always has a little fever after a sword-wound. You should know that, as this is your twelfth."

"Oh, *mon Dieu!*!" suddenly cried Bussy, struck by a new idea, and thinking only of the mystery of the night, "did my dream begin outside the door instead of beginning inside? Was there no more alley and staircase than bed of white and gold damask and portrait? Did these wretches, thinking me dead, simply carry me to the Temple to divert the suspicions of some spectator of the scene? Then I have surely dreamed the rest. *Mon Dieu!* if it be so, and they procured me this dream which haunts me, devours me, and kills me, I swear I will kill them all to the last!"

"My dear count," said the physician, "if you wish to be promptly cured, you must not get so agitated."

"Except that good Saint-Luc," said Bussy, without listening to the doctor. "He is different, and behaved as a friend. Therefore, my first visit will be for him."

"But only this evening; not before five o'clock!"

"Very well," said Bussy; "only I assure you that I shall not be made ill by going out and seeing people, but by remaining quiet and alone."

"After all, that may be," said the doctor; "you are in all things a most singular patient. Do as you please, monseigneur. I only recommend one thing,—do not get another wound before this one is healed."

Bussy promised the physician to do his best to avoid this; and after being dressed, he called for his litter and was carried to the Hôtel de Montmorency.

CHAPTER IV.

HOW MADEMOISELLE DE BRISSAC, OR RATHER MADAME DE SAINT-LUC, HAD SPENT HER WEDDING-NIGHT.

LOUIS DE CLERMONT, better known under the name of Bussy d'Amboise, and, according to his cousin Brantôme, ranking among the great generals of the sixteenth century, was a very handsome man, and a perfect gentleman. It was long since any man had made more glorious conquests. Kings and princes sought his friendship; queens and princesses lavished on him their sweetest smiles. Bussy had succeeded La Mole in the affections of Marguerite of Navarre. The good queen, whose tender heart needed consolation after the death of the favorite whose history we have written, had been guilty of so many follies for the brave and handsome Bussy d'Amboise that even Henri, her husband, had been moved by them,—he, who was usually insensible to these sorts of things; and the Duc François would never have forgiven Bussy for obtaining his sister's love, if this love had not won over Bussy to his interests. Here again, the duke sacrificed his love to that hidden and irresolute ambition, which during the whole course of his existence, was to bring him so many sorrows, and bear so little fruit.

But Bussy, in the midst of all his successes of war, ambition, and gallantry, had maintained his soul inaccessible to every human weakness, and he who had never known fear, had never known love,—never, at least, until the period we have now reached. This heart of an emperor that beat in his breast was virginal and pure as the diamond which the lapidary's hand has not yet touched, and which is just leaving the mine where it has lain to be perfected by the rays of the sun. Thus, there was no room in that heart for the details of thought which would have made Bussy a real emperor. He thought himself worthy of a crown, and was better than the crown which served him as a comparison.

Henri III. had offered him his friendship, and Bussy had refused it, saying that the friends of kings are their valets, and sometimes even worse ; therefore a similar condition was not to his taste. Henri III. had devoured in silence this insult, further aggrieved by the choice made by Bussy of the Duc François for his master. It is true that the Duc François was Bussy's master, as the keeper is the lion's master. He serves him, and feeds him, for fear that the lion should eat him. Such was the Bussy whom François urged to uphold him in all his quarrels. Bussy realized this, but the part suited him.

He had a theory after the manner of the Rohan's motto, which said : " King, I cannot be ; prince, I will not be ; Rohan, I am." Bussy said to himself, " I cannot be King of France, but M. le Duc d'Anjou can be, and wishes to be ; I shall be M. d'Anjou's king."

And he was, in truth.

When M. de Saint-Luc's servants saw that formidable Bussy appear, they hastened to inform M. de Brissac.

" Is M. de Saint-Luc at home ? " asked Bussy, showing his head between the curtains of his litter.

" No, monsieur," said the *concierge*.

" Where shall I find him ? "

" I cannot say, monsieur," replied the worthy man. " We are all very uneasy about him. M. de Saint-Luc has not returned since yesterday."

" Impossible ! " said Bussy, astonished.

" I have had the honor of telling you the truth."

" But Madame de Saint-Luc ? "

" Oh, Madame de Saint-Luc,—that is different."

" Is she here ? "

" Yes."

" Tell her I shall be delighted if she will permit me to pay my respects to her."

Five minutes later the messenger returned to say that Madame de Saint-Luc would receive M. de Bussy with much pleasure.

Bussy rose from his velvet cushions and mounted the grand staircase. Jeanne de Cossé came as far as the

centre of the great reception room to meet the young man. She was very pale, and her hair, black as the raven's wing, gave an ivory tint to her pallor ; her eyes were red from sleeplessness, and one might have seen on her cheek the furrow left by recent tears. Bussy, who had smiled when he saw her pale face, and prepared an appropriate compliment for her black-encircled eyes, stopped in his improvisation when he beheld these marks of real sorrow.

" You are welcome, M. de Bussy," said the young lady, " in spite of the fears your presence awakens."

" What do you mean, madame, and how can my presence announce a misfortune ? "

" Ah, there was a meeting last night between you and M. de Saint-Luc ? Confess it."

" Between — and Saint-Luc," repeated Bussy, in surprise.

" Yes, he sent me away to speak to you. You belong to the Duc d'Anjou ; he belongs to the king ; you quarrelled. Conceal nothing from me, M. de Bussy, I beseech you. You must understand my anxiety. He left with the king, it is true ; but you have met him joined him somewhere. Confess the truth to me. What has happened to M. de Saint-Luc ? "

" Madame," said Bussy, " this is truly marvellous. I expected you to ask after my wound, and you are questioning me."

" M. de Saint-Luc wounded you ? He did fight then ! " cried Jeanne. " Ah, you see—"

" No, madame, he has not fought,—at least, not with me, that dear Saint-Luc ; and, thank Heaven, I was not wounded by his hand. Even more : he did what he could to save me. But he must have told you himself that we are now like Damon and Pythias."

" How could he tell me, when I have not even seen him ? "

" You have not seen him ? Then your *concierge* spoke the truth."

" What did he tell you ? "

" That M. de Saint-Luc had not returned since eleven o'clock last night. You have not seen your husband since eleven o'clock ? "

" Alas ! No."

" But where can he be ? "

" I ask you that question."

" Oh, *pardieu* ! tell me all about it, madame," said Bussy, who had a suspicion of what had taken place ; " it is very droll."

The poor woman looked at him with the greatest surprise.

" No, it is very sad, I meant to say," resumed the young man. " I have lost a great deal of blood ; so that I am not in possession of all my faculties. Tell me this lamentable story, madame."

Jeanne told all she knew ; the order given by Henri III. to Saint-Luc to accompany him, the closing of the gates of the Louvre, and the answer of the guards, which had been followed by no return.

" Ah, very well," said Bussy ; " I understand."

" How do you understand ? " asked Jeanne.

" Yes, his Majesty carried him off to the Louvre, and once there, Saint-Luc was not able to leave."

" And why was not Saint-Luc able to leave ? "

" Ah," said Bussy, embarrassed, " you are asking me to divulge state secrets."

" But I went to the Louvre myself, and so did my father."

" Well ? "

" Well, the guards answered that they did not know what we meant, and that M. de Saint-Luc must have returned home."

" All the more reason that M. de Saint-Luc should be at the Louvre," said Bussy.

" You think so ? "

" I am sure ; and if you wish to ascertain for yourself—"

" How ? "

" By seeing for yourself."

" Can I ? "

“ Certainly.”

“ But what is the use of going to the palace ? I would be sent away as I was sent before, with the same words. If he were there, who would prevent my seeing him ? ”

“ Do you wish to enter the Louvre, I ask you ? ”

“ What for ? ”

“ To see Saint-Luc.”

“ But if he is not there ? ”

“ Eh ! *Mordieu !* I tell you he is there.”

“ That is strange.”

“ No it is royal.”

“ But can you enter the Louvre ? ”

“ Certainly, I am not M. de Saint-Luc’s wife.”

“ You bewilder me.”

“ Come, nevertheless.”

“ What do you mean ? You pretend that M. de Saint-Luc’s wife cannot enter the Louvre, and you wish to take me with you.”

“ Not at all, madame ; it is not Saint-Luc’s wife that I wish to conduct thither. A woman,—surely, no ! ”

“ Then you are laughing at me, and seeing my sadness, it is cruel.”

“ Eh, no ! Dear lady, listen : you are twenty years old, you are tall, with black eyes, a slender figure, and you resemble my youngest page,—do you understand ? —the handsome fellow who looked so well in cloth of gold last night.”

“ Ah, what folly ! ” cried Jeanne, blushing.

“ Listen, I have no other means to propose. You may do as you choose. You say you wish to see your dear Saint-Luc ? ”

“ I would give everything to see him.”

“ Well, I promise you shall see him without giving anything.”

“ Yes, but—”

“ Oh, I told you how.”

“ Well, M. de Bussy, I will do as you wish. You have but to inform this young boy that I need one of his costumes, and I shall send one of my maids.”

" Not at all ; I shall send for one of the new costumes I intend these scamps to wear at the first ball given by the queen-mother. I shall select the one I think most adapted to your figure ; then you must join me at some appointed place. To-night, Rue Saint-Honoré, near the Rue des Prouvaires, for instance ; and from there—"

" From there ? "

" Well, we shall go to the Louvre together."

Jeanne began to laugh, and held out her hand to Bussy.

" Pardon my suspicions," she said.

" With all my heart. You will furnish me with an adventure that will make all Europe laugh. It is I who am indebted to you."

And taking leave of the young woman, he returned home to make preparations for the masquerade.

That night, at the appointed hour, Bussy and Madame de Saint-Luc met near the Barrière des Sergents. If she had not worn the costume of his page, Bussy would not have recognized her. She was charming in her disguise. After exchanging a few words, both took the road to the Louvre.

At the end of the Rue de Fossès-Saint-Germain-l'Auxerrois, they met a large party. This party took up the whole street, and blocked up the passage.

Jeanne was frightened. Bussy recognized the Duc d'Anjou by the muskets and torches, and also by his piebald horse, and the white velvet cloak he was always in the habit of wearing.

" Ah," said Bussy, turning to Jeanne, " you were anxious to know, my young page, how you would be able to penetrate into the Louvre ? Well, you may now be easy on that score ; we will make a triumphal entry."

" Eh, monseigneur ! " cried Bussy with all his strength to the Duc d'Anjou.

The call was loud, and, in spite of the noise of the horses' hoofs and of the voices, reached the prince.

François turned round.

" You, Bussy ! " he cried with delight. " I thought

you were mortally wounded, and was going to your lodging of la Corne du Cerf, Rue de Grenelle."

" Faith ! monseigneur," said Bussy, without even thanking the prince for this mark of attention, " if I am not dead, it is nobody's fault except my own. In truth, you place me in nice situations, and abandon me in merry ambuscades. Yesterday, that ball of Saint-Luc's was a universal snare. I was the only Angevine there, and upon my honor, they nearly drained me of every drop of blood I have in my body."

" *Par la mort !* Bussy, they will pay dearly for your blood, and I shall make them count the drops."

" Yes, you say so," replied Bussy, with his usual freedom, " and you will smile on the first one you meet. If in smiling you even showed your teeth—but your lips are too tight for that."

" Well ! " replied the prince, " accompany me to the Louvre, and you will see."

" What shall I see, monseigneur ? "

" You will see in what manner I shall speak to my brother."

" Listen, monseigneur ; I am not going to the Louvre to receive a rebuff. That is good for princes of the blood and for favorites."

" Be not uneasy ; I have taken the matter to heart."

" You promise me a good reparation ? "

" I promise you shall be satisfied. You still hesitate, I believe ? "

" Monseigneur, I know you so well."

" Come, I tell you ; it will be talked about."

" Here is your opportunity," whispered Bussy to the countess. " There will be a dreadful quarrel between these two brothers, who cordially hate each other ; and you, during that time, can find your Saint-Luc."

" Well," asked the duke, " have you made up your mind, or must I give you my word of honor as a prince ? "

" Oh, no ! " said Bussy, " that would bring me bad luck. Well, come what may, I shall follow you ; and if I am insulted, I know how to revenge myself."

Bussy took his place near the prince, while the new page kept close to his master, and followed immediately behind him.

" Revenge ! no, no ! " said the prince, answering Bussy's threat. " That is not for you to do, my brave gentleman. I shall take charge of your vengeance. Listen," he added in a low tone. " I know your assassins."

" Ah ! " said Bussy. " Has your Highness taken the trouble to inquire ? "

" I saw them."

" How so ? " asked Bussy, surprised.

" I had business myself at the Porte Saint-Antoine, where they met me, and came near killing me in your place. Ah, I did not suspect it was you they were waiting for, the villains ! or else—"

" Or else ? Well ? "

" Did you have that new page with you ? " asked the prince, without finishing his threat.

" No, monseigneur," said Bussy, " I was alone ; and you ? "

" I was with D'Aurilly ; and why were you alone ? "

" Because I wish to preserve the name of Brave Bussy they have given me."

" And they wounded you ? " continued the prince, with his habit of replying by a feint to the blows that were aimed at him.

" Listen," said Bussy. " I do not wish to give them the pleasure of knowing it, but I have a severe sword wound in the side."

" Ah, the wretches ! " cried the prince. " D'Aurilly was right when he said they had evil intentions."

" What ! " said Bussy. " You saw the ambush ? You were with D'Aurilly, who manages the sword almost as well as the lute ! He told your Highness that these people had evil intentions ; you were two, they were only five, yet you did not watch to lend assistance ? "

" Well ! what will you have ; I did not know for whom they were waiting."

" Mort diable !—as your brother Charles IX. used to

say—when you recognized King Henri III.'s friends, you must have thought that they intended harm to some friends of yours. Now, as I am about the only one that has the courage to be your friend, it was not difficult to guess that they were waiting for me."

"Yes, you may be right, my dear Bussy," said François, "but I did not think of all that."

"Indeed!" sighed Bussy, as if this word summed up all he thought of his master.

They reached the Louvre. The Duc d'Anjou was received at the gate by the captain and the gate-keepers. The orders were most severe, but, as we may suppose, did not apply to the greatest man in the kingdom after the king. The duke therefore passed over the bridge followed by all his suite.

"Monseigneur," said Bussy, when he found himself in the courtyard, "go and do your quarrelling, and remember your solemn promise to me; I have a few words to speak to some one."

"You leave me, Bussy," said the prince, with a touch of anxiety; he had counted a little on the presence of his gentleman.

"It is necessary, but have no uneasiness; I shall return in the thickest of the fight. Speak loud, monseigneur, speak loud, *mordieu!* speak loud, that I may hear. If I do not, you understand, I shall not come."

Then, taking advantage of the duke's entrance into the main hall, he glided into the private apartments, followed by Jeanne.

Bussy knew the Louvre as thoroughly as his own *hôtel*. He took a secret staircase, passed two or three lonely corridors, and came to a sort of ante-chamber.

"Wait for me here," he said to Jeanne.

"Oh, *mon Dieu!* you leave me alone?" said the young girl, greatly frightened.

"It is necessary," said Bussy. "I must go first and prepare the way."

CHAPTER V.

HOW MADEMOISELLE DE BRISSAC, OR RATHER MADAME DE SAINT-LUC, ARRANGED TO SPEND THE SECOND NIGHT OF HER MARRIAGE.

BUSSY went straight to the fencing-room of which King Charles IX. was so fond, and which, in consequence of a new arrangement, had become the sleeping-room of King Henri III., who had furnished it to suit himself. Charles IX., hunter, blacksmith, and poet, had in this room, hunting-horns, muskets, manuscripts, books, and vises. Henri III. had two beds of velvet and satin, licentious pictures, reliques, scapulars blessed by the Pope, perfumed sachets from the East, and a collection of the finest fencing-foils in the world.

Bussy was well aware that the king would not be in this chamber, as his brother had asked for an audience in the gallery; but he also knew that near there was a little room formerly belonging to Charles IX.'s nurse, and occupied at present by each of the favorites in turn. Now, as Henri III. was very fickle in his friendships, this room had been successively inhabited by Saint-Mégrin, Maugiron, D'O, D'Epernon, Quélus, and Schomberg, and according to Bussy's idea, must now be occupied by Saint-Luc, whom the king, in his great affection, had carried away from his young wife.

Henri III., a man of strange organization, frivolous, deep, timid, brave, always bored, always uneasy, always dreaming, was in need of eternal diversion. During the day, noise, games, exercise, buffoonery, masquerades, intrigues; during the night, light, gossip, prayer, or debauch. Henri III. is the only individual of this character found in our modern world.

Henri III., the hermaphrodite of the ancients, was destined to be born in some Oriental city, in the midst of a world of mutes, eunuchs, pages, philosophers, and sophists, and his reign would have been an era of mild

debauches and unknown follies, a medium between Nero and Heliogabalus.

Now, Bussy, suspecting that Saint-Luc occupied the nurse's apartment, knocked at the ante-chamber common to the two rooms.

The captain of the guards opened.

"M. de Bussy!" cried the officer, astonished.

"Yes, in person, my dear Monsieur de Nancey," said Bussy. "The king wishes to speak to M. de Saint-Luc."

"Very well," answered the captain, "let M. de Saint-Luc be notified that the king wishes to speak to him."

Through the open door, Bussy threw a glance at the page, then turning to M. de Nancey,—

"What is that poor Saint-Luc doing?" he asked.

"He is playing with Chicot while awaiting the king, who has just gone to give the audience requested by M. le Duc d'Anjou."

"Will you permit my page to wait here?" asked Bussy.

"Most willingly," replied the captain.

"Come in, Jean," said Bussy, and he pointed to the embrasure of a window, in which she took refuge. She had hardly concealed herself when Saint-Luc entered, and M. de Nancey discreetly withdrew beyond reach of their voices.

"What does the king want now?" asked Saint-Luc, in an angry voice. "Ah, it is you, M. de Bussy?"

"Myself, my dear Saint-Luc. And first of all," he lowered his voice, "let me thank you for the service you rendered me."

"Ah," said Saint-Luc, "it was quite natural. I could not bear to see a brave gentleman like you assassinated. I thought you were killed."

"I came very near it; but in a case like this, a little is a great deal."

"How so?"

"I got off with a neat sword-thrust, which I returned with interest, I believe, to Schomberg and D'Epernon.

As for Quélus, he may thank the bones of his skull. It is one of the hardest I have ever met with."

" Ah, tell me your adventure ; it will amuse me," said Saint-Luc, yawning enough to dislocate his jaws.

" I have no time at present, my dear Saint-Luc. Besides, I have come for something else. You are very much bored, it seems ? "

" Royally ; that means everything."

" Well, I have come to amuse you. The devil ! one good turn deserves another."

" You are right, and the one you render me is no less great than the one I rendered you. One dies of *ennui* as well as from a wound ; it is longer, but surer."

" Poor count," said Bussy ; " you are then a prisoner, as I suspected."

" Absolutely a prisoner. The king pretends that I alone can amuse him. The king is very good, for since yesterday I have made more faces than his monkey, and said more rude things to him than his jester."

" Well, let us see ; may I not, as I offered, do you some good turn ? "

" Certainly," said Saint-Luc, " you can go to my *hôtel*, or rather to the Maréchal de Brissac's, and reassure my poor little wife, who must be very anxious, and doubtless finds my conduct most strange."

" What shall I tell her ? "

" Eh ! *pardieu*, tell her what you have seen ; that I am a guarded prisoner, that since yesterday the king talks to me of friendship like Cicero who wrote on it, and of virtue like Socrates who practised it."

" And what do you answer ? " asked Bussy, laughing.

" *Mordieu* ! I replied to him, that as to friendship I am ungrateful, and as to virtue, I am perverted. He none the less insists, and repeats with a sigh ; ' Ah, Saint-Luc, is friendship but a dream ? Ah, Saint-Luc, is virtue but a name ? ' Only after having said this in French, he repeats it in Latin, and then in Greek."

At this sally, the page to whom Saint-Luc had not yet paid the slightest attention, burst out laughing.

“ What more will you have, my friend ? He wishes to touch your feelings. *Bis repetita placent*, why not *ter* ? But is this all I can do for you ? ”

“ Ah, *mon Dieu* ! Yes, I fear it is.”

“ Well, I have done it.”

“ How so ? ”

“ I suspected all that has happened, and have already told your wife.”

“ And what did she answer ? ”

“ At first, she would not believe me. But,” added Bussy, glancing towards the window, “ I hope she has now yielded to evidence. Ask me something else,—something difficult, or even impossible ; there will be some pleasure in doing that.”

“ Then, my dear Bussy, borrow for a few moments the hippocriff of the brave knight Astolpho, and bring it to one of these windows. I shall mount behind you, and you will take me to my wife. You may then continue your journey to the moon, if you like.”

“ My dear friend,” said Bussy, “ we might do something much more simple. I might take the hippocriff to your wife, and bring her here.”

“ Here ? ”

“ Yes, here.”

“ In the Louvre ? ”

“ Even here, in the Louvre. Tell me, would you not find that much more amusing ? ”

“ Oh, *mordieu* ! I should say so.”

“ Would you still be bored ? ”

“ No, not I.”

“ You told me you were bored, did you not ? ”

“ Ask Chicot. Since this morning, I have a horror of him, and proposed to fight him. The fellow was so mad that any one would have died of laughter, yet I did not even smile ; but if this continue, I think I shall kill him outright, or be killed by him, to amuse me.”

“ *Peste* ! Do not venture ; you know that Chicot is a famous swordsman. You would be even more bored in your coffin than you are here.”

"Upon my word, I don't know."

"Come," said Bussy, laughing, "would you like to have my page?"

"I?"

"Yes, a wonderful lad."

"Thanks," said Saint-Luc, "I detest pages. The king offered to send for the one of my own that I liked the best, and I refused. Offer him to the king, who is arranging his household. When I leave here, I shall do what was done at Chenonceaux for the green feast,—I shall be served by women only, and I myself shall design their costumes."

"Pshaw!" insisted Bussy, "try him, at least."

"Bussy," said Saint-Luc, annoyed, "it is not kind of you to make fun of me in this way."

"Let me leave him."

"No."

"When I tell you I know you need him."

"No, no, no,—a hundred times no!"

"Holloa, page, come hither!"

"*Mordieu!*" cried Saint-Luc.

The page left the window and advanced blushing.

"Oh, oh!" murmured Saint-Luc, stupefied on recognizing Jeanne in Bussy's livery.

"Well," asked Bussy, "shall I send him away?"

"No, no!" cried Saint-Luc. "Ah, Bussy, I owe you an eternal friendship."

"Take care, Saint-Luc; you are not heard, but you are seen."

"That is true," said the latter, and after having taken two steps towards his wife, he moved back three.

In fact, M. de Nancey, surprised at Saint-Luc's rather too expressive pantomime, was beginning to listen, when a great noise coming from the gallery aroused his attention.

"Ah, *mon Dieu!*" cried M. de Nancey, "the king is quarrelling with some one it seems."

"I really think so," replied Bussy, with affected uneasiness. "Is it perchance with the Duc d'Anjou, who came with me?"

The captain of the guards fastened on his sword, and rushed off in the direction of the gallery whence came the sounds of a violent discussion.

“ Tell me that I have not managed well,” said Bussy, turning to Saint-Luc.

“ What is the matter ? ”

“ The king and M. d’Anjou are tearing each other to pieces just at present, and as it must be a very fine sight, I shall hasten thither not to lose it. You take advantage of the uproar, not to fly, as the king would always catch you, but to put that beautiful page in a place of safety ; is it possible ? ”

“ Yes, *pardieu* ! and besides if it were not, I should make it so ; but fortunately I am supposed to be ill, and am therefore confined to my chamber.”

“ In that case, adieu, Saint-Luc. Madame, remember me in your prayers.”

And Bussy, quite delighted at having played this trick on the king, left the ante-chamber and went to the gallery, where Henri III., crimson with anger, was swearing to the Duc d’Anjou, pale with rage, that in the scene of the preceding night, Bussy had been the aggressor.

“ I affirm, sire,” cried the Duc d’Anjou, “ that D’Epernon, Schomberg, D’O, Maugiron, and Quélus were waiting for him at the Hôtel des Tournelles.”

“ Who told you so ? ”

“ I saw them myself, with my own eyes.”

“ In that darkness ? The night was as black as an oven.”

“ I did not recognize them by their faces.”

“ How then,—by their shoulders ? ”

“ No, sire, by their voices.”

“ They spoke to you ? ”

“ They did more,—they took me for Bussy, and attacked me.”

“ You ? ”

“ Yes, me.”

“ And what were you doing at the Porte Saint-Antoine ? ”

“ What do you care ? ”

“ I wish to know ; I am curious to-day.”

“ I was going to Manassès.”

“ To Manassès, a Jew ? ”

“ You go to Ruggieri, a poisoner.”

“ I go where I choose ; I am the king.”

“ That is no answer ; that is arrogance.”

“ Besides, as I said, Bussy was the aggressor.”

“ Bussy ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ Where ? ”

“ At Saint-Luc’s ball.”

“ Bussy provoked five men ? Come, come, Bussy is brave, but he is not a fool.”

“ *Par la mordieu !* I tell you I heard the provocation myself. Besides, he was quite capable of it, since, in spite of what you say, he wounded Schomberg in the thigh, D’Epernon in the arm, and nearly broke Quélus’s head.”

“ Ah, really ? ” said the duke, “ he had not told me that. I must congratulate him.”

“ I,” said the king, “ shall congratulate no one, but I will make an example of this fighter.”

“ And I,” said the duke,—“ I who am attacked by your friends, not only in Bussy’s person, but in my own,—I will know if I am your brother, I will know if there is in France a single person besides your Majesty who has the right to look me in the face and not lower his eyes through fear if not through respect.”

At this moment, attracted by the noise of the quarrel, appeared Bussy, elegantly attired in pale green with pink bows.

“ Sire,” he said, bowing before Henri III., “ accept my most humble respects.”

“ *Pardieu !* here he is,” said Henri.

“ Your Majesty, it seems, was doing me the honor of speaking of me ? ” asked Bussy.

“ Yes,” answered the king ; “ I am very glad to see you ; in spite of what I was told. Your appearance is indicative of good health.”

“ Sire, the loss of blood freshens the complexion,” said Bussy, “ so mine ought to be very fresh this evening.”

“ Well, since you have been beaten and bruised, complain, Seigneur de Bussy, and you shall have justice.”

“ With your permission, sire,” said Bussy, “ I have been neither beaten nor bruised, and I do not complain.”

Henri remained stupefied, and looked at the Duc d’Anjou.

“ Well, what were you saying ? ” he asked.

“ I said that Bussy had received a sword wound in the side.”

“ Is it true, Bussy ? ” asked the king.

“ Since your Majesty’s brother has so stated, it must be true,” said Bussy ; “ the first prince of the blood can tell no lies.”

“ And having a sword wound in the side, you do not complain ? ” said Henri.

“ I would complain, sire, only if my right hand were cut off to prevent my avenging myself ; even then,” continued the incorrigible duellist, “ I hope I would do it with my left hand.”

“ Insolent ! ” murmured Henri.

“ Sire,” said the Duc d’Anjou, “ you spoke of justice. Well, give us justice ; we ask for nothing more. Order an inquiry, appoint the judges, that every one may know whence came the ambush, and who prepared the assassination.”

Henri reddened.

“ No,” he said ; “ I prefer this time to remain in ignorance of the wrong-doers, and include every one in a general pardon. I prefer that these bitter enemies should make peace, and I am sorry that Schomberg and D’Epernon should be kept at home by their wounds. Come, M. d’Anjou, which one, in your mind, was the most violent of all my friends ? You can easily tell me, since you pretend to have seen them.”

“ Sire,” said the Duc d’Anjou, “ it was Quélus.”

“ Faith ! yes,” said Quélus ; “ his Highness is right, and I do not deny it.”

"Then," said Henri, "let M. de Bussy and M. de Quélus make peace in the name of all."

"Oh, oh!" said Quélus, "what is the meaning of this, sire?"

"It means that you are to embrace, here, before me, at this instant."

Quélus frowned.

"Ah, signor," said Bussy, turning towards Quélus and imitating the Italian gesture of a pantaloon, "will you not do me this favor?"

The sally was so unexpected, and Bussy had made it with so much animation, that the king himself began to laugh. Then approaching Quélus:—

"Come, monsieur," he said, "the king wishes it."

And he threw both arms around his neck.

"I hope this binds us to nothing," whispered Quélus to Bussy.

"Be assured," answered Bussy, in the same tone, "that we shall soon meet again."

Quélus, red, and with his hair in disorder, withdrew, furious. Henri frowned, and Bussy, still imitating the pantaloon, made a pirouette, and went out of the gallery.

CHAPTER VI.

THE BED-CHAMBER RECEPTION OF KING HENRI III.

AFTER this scene, begun as a tragedy and ended as a comedy, and the noise of which had spread through the city like an echo from the Louvre, the king, still in an angry mood, returned to his room, followed by Chicot, who was asking for his supper.

"I am not hungry," said the king, crossing the threshold of his door.

"Very possible," said Chicot, "but I am in a rage and must bite something, if only a leg of mutton."

The king pretended not to hear. He unclasped his cloak, which he laid on the bed, took off his cap, fastened

to his hair by long black pins, and threw it on his chair ; then advancing towards the passage leading to Saint-Luc's chamber, separated from his own by a single wall :—

“ Wait here till I return, jester,” he said.

“ Oh, don't hurry, my son,” said Chicot, “ don't hurry. I even wish,” he added, listening to Henri's retreating footsteps, “ that you would give me the time to prepare a little surprise.”

When he could no longer hear the king's footsteps,—

“ Halloo ! ” he called, opening the door of the antechamber.

A valet hastened to him.

“ The king has changed his mind,” he said ; “ he wishes a good supper for himself and Saint-Luc. He recommended the wine, above all ; be quick.”

The valet turned on his heel to execute Chicot's order, which he believed to be the king's.

As to Henri, he had gone, as we said, into Saint-Luc's apartment. The latter, expecting his Majesty's visit, had gone to bed, and was having prayers read to him by an old servant who had followed him to the Louvre and been imprisoned with him. On a gilded armchair in one corner, with her head buried in her hands, slept the page brought by Bussy.

The king saw all this at a glance.

“ Who is that young man ? ” he anxiously asked Saint-Luc.

“ Did not your Majesty authorize me to send for a page ? ”

“ Yes, of course,” replied Henri III.

“ Well, I took advantage of the permission, sire.”

“ Ah, ah ! ”

“ Does your Majesty repent of having granted me this little diversion ? ” inquired Saint-Luc.

“ No, no, my son, not at all ; amuse yourself, on the contrary. Well, how are you ? ”

“ Sire,” said Saint-Luc, “ I have a hot fever.”

“ In fact,” said the king, “ your face is very red, my

child. Let me feel your pulse. You know I am something of a physician."

Saint-Luc extended his hand with visible ill humor.

" Oh ! " said the king, " irregular, agitated."

" Oh, sire ! " said Saint-Luc, " I am truly very ill."

" Do not be uneasy," said Henri, " I shall have you attended by my own physician."

" Thank you, sire ; I detest Miron."

" I will take care of you myself."

" Sire, I would never permit—"

" I shall have a bed prepared for you in my room, Saint-Luc. We will talk all night ; I have a thousand things to tell you."

" Ah," cried Saint-Luc, in despair, " you say you are a physician ; you say you are my friend, and you want to keep me from sleeping. *Morbleu !* doctor, you have a curious way of treating your patients ! *Morbleu !* sire, you have a singular way of loving your friends."

" What ! you wish to remain alone, ill as you are ? "

" Sire, I have my page, Jean."

" But he sleeps."

" That is the way I like people to watch me ; at least, they do not prevent me from sleeping myself."

" Let me at least watch you with him ; I shall only speak to you if you wake up."

" Sire, I am very cross when I wake up, and one must be very well accustomed to me to forgive all the foolish things I say when I have just been awakened."

" At least come and see me go to bed."

" Then I shall be free to come back to my own room ? "

" Perfectly free."

" Very well, but I shall be a sad courtier, I warn you ; I am dying with sleep."

" You shall yawn all you like."

" What tyranny," said Saint-Luc, " when you have all your other friends ! "

" Ah, yes, they are in a fine condition ! Bussy has nicely treated them. Schomberg has his thigh cut open ; D'Epernon has his wrist slashed like a Spanish sleeve ;

Quélus is still bewildered by the blow on his head yesterday and the embrace of to-day ; there remains D'O, who bores me to death, and Maugiron, who sulks. Come, wake up that lazy page, and slip on a dressing-gown ! ”

“ Sire, if your Majesty will leave me ! ”

“ Why so ? ”

“ Respect—”

“ How absurd ! ”

“ Sire, in five minutes I shall be in your Majesty’s room.”

“ In five minutes, very well ; but no more,—do you hear ? And during these five minutes try to think up some good stories, that we may laugh a little.”

Thereupon the king, who had obtained half of what he wanted, went out half pleased.

The door had no sooner closed behind him than the page awoke with a start and bounded up.

“ Ah, Saint-Luc,” she said, when the noise of the footsteps had died away, “ you are going to leave me again ! *Mon Dieu*, how dreadful ! I shall die of fright here. If I were to be discovered ? ”

“ My dear Jeanne,” said Saint-Luc, pointing out to her the old servant, “ Gaspard, who is here, will defend you against all indiscretions.”

“ Then I might as well go away,” said the young wife, blushing.

“ If you really wish it Jeanne,” said Saint-Luc, sadly. “ I shall have you accompanied home, as the order applies only to me ; but if you are as good as you are beautiful, if you have in your heart any tenderness for poor Saint-Luc, you will wait here a while. I shall suffer so much from my head and nerves that the king will not want so sad a companion, and will send me to bed.”

Jeanne lowered her eyes.

“ Go, then,” she said, “ I shall wait ; but I shall say, like the king, do not be long.”

“ Jeanne, my dear Jeanne, you are adorable ! ” said Saint-Luc. “ Trust to me to return as soon as possible.

Besides, I have an idea, which I must improve a little, and which I will tell you when I return."

" An idea that will restore your liberty ? "

" I hope so."

" Then go ! "

" Gaspard," said Saint-Luc, " see that no one enters here ; then, in a quarter of an hour, lock the door, and bring me the key in the king's room. Go to the *hôtel* and tell them to have no anxiety about Madame la Comtesse, and only return to-morrow."

Gaspard smilingly promised to execute the orders, to which the young woman listened with many blushes. Saint-Luc took his wife's hand, kissed it tenderly, and ran to the king, who was already getting impatient.

Jeanne, alone and trembling, hid behind the ample curtains of the bed, and there, thoughtful, uneasy, and angry, she tried to find some means to come out victoriously of the strange position in which she found herself.

When Saint-Luc entered the king's room, he inhaled the strong and voluptuous perfume of the royal chamber. Henri's feet were, in fact, buried in flowers, the stems of which had been cut, that they might not irritate his Majesty's tender skin. Roses, jessamines, violets, wall-flowers, in spite of the season, formed a soft and fragrant carpet for King Henri III.

The room, the ceiling of which had been lowered and decorated with beautiful paintings on canvas, was furnished, as we have said, with two beds, one of which was so large that although the head was against the wall, it occupied nearly one-third of the space.

This bed was hung with gold and silk tapestry adorned with mythological figures representing the story of Cenea, or Cenis, sometimes a man, sometimes a woman,—a metamorphosis which did not take place without the most fantastic efforts of imagination on the part of the painter. The top of the bed was in cloth of silver worked with gold, and figures in silk ; and the royal arms, richly embroidered, were applied on that portion of the canopy which, being next to the wall, formed the head of the bed.

The window curtains were of the same tapestry as the bed ; the lounges and armchairs were covered with the same material as that of the bed and windows. From the centre of the ceiling hung, suspended by a gold chain, a silver-gilt lamp, in which burned a species of perfumed oil which spread a delicious odor as it was consumed. To the right of the bed was a golden satyr, holding in his hand a golden candelabrum containing four rose-colored wax candles, also perfumed. These candles, as large as tapers, together with the lamp, threw out enough light to illumine the room sufficiently.

The king, with his bare feet resting on the flowers that covered the floor, was seated on a chair of ebony inlaid with gold. He held on his knees seven or eight very young spaniels, whose cold noses gently tickled his hands. Two servants parted and curled his hair (tucked up like that of a woman), his moustache and scant, fluffy beard. A third covered the prince's face with a thick coating of rose cream, of a particular taste and most delightful odor.

Henri closed his eyes and allowed himself to be thus handled, with the majesty of a Hindoo god.

"Saint-Luc!" he said. "Where is Saint-Luc?"

Saint-Luc entered. Chicot took him by the hand, and led him to the king.

"Here," he said to Henri, "here he is, your friend Saint-Luc. Tell him to clean himself, or rather, grease himself. If you do not take this indispensable precaution, a dreadful thing will happen ; either he will smell bad, compared to you who smell so sweet, or you will smell too sweet for him who smells nothing at all. Quick, the greases and combs!" added Chicot, stretching himself in a large armchair opposite the king. "I will try them, too."

"Chicot, Chicot," cried Henri, "your skin is too dry, and would absorb too great a quantity of cream,—there is hardly enough for me ; and your beard is so hard it will break my combs."

"My skin has dried in campaigning for you, ungrateful prince ; and if my hair is stiff, it is because you keep me

in such an ill humor that it always stands on end. But if you refuse me cream for my cheeks,—that is, for my external self,—very well, my son, I shall say no more."

Henri shrugged his shoulders like a man little disposed to find amusement in his jester's wit.

"Leave me," he said; "you talk nonsense." Then, turning to Saint-Luc,—

"Well, my son," he asked, "how is your head?"

Saint-Luc carried his hand to his head, and groaned.

"Imagine!" continued Henri, "I saw Bussy d'Amboise. Oh, monsieur," he said to the hair-dresser, "you are burning me!"

The hair-dresser knelt down.

"You have seen Bussy d'Amboise, sire?" said Saint-Luc, trembling.

"Yes," answered the king; "do you understand these fools? Five of them attacked him, and let him escape. I shall have them broken on the wheel. If you had been there, Saint-Luc!"

"Sire," answered the young man, "I would probably not have been more fortunate than my companions."

"Come, what are you saying? I would wager one thousand crowns that you would touch Bussy ten times to his six. *Pardieu!* we shall have to see that to-morrow. Do you still fence, my son?"

"Yes, sire."

"I ask if you often practise?"

"Nearly every day, when I am well; but when I am ill, sire, I am absolutely good for nothing."

"How many times did you touch me?"

"We had an even game, sire."

"Yes, but I fence better than Bussy. *Par la mordieu!* monsieur," said Henri, to his barber, "you are pulling off my moustache."

The barber knelt down.

"Sire," said Saint-Luc, "give me some remedy for nausea."

"You must eat," said the king.

"Oh, sire, I fear you are mistaken."

"No, I assure you."

"You are right, Valois," said Chicot; "and as I have great nausea, or am ill, I know not which, I follow the prescription."

A very singular noise was heard, like that of the rapid movement of a monkey's jaws. The king turned round and saw Chicot, who, after having devoured alone the double supper he had ordered in the king's name, was noisily working his mouth as he absorbed the contents of a Japanese porcelain cup.

"What the devil are you doing, Monsieur Chicot?" said Henri.

"Taking my cream internally," said Chicot, "since you will not allow me to apply it externally."

"Ah, traitor!" said the king, turning his head so suddenly that the cream-laden finger of the valet entered his mouth.

"Eat, my son," said Chicot, gravely. "I am not so tyrannical as you. Externally or internally, I allow them both."

"Monsieur, you choke me," said Henri, to the valet.

The valet knelt down as the hair-dresser and barber had already done.

"Call my captain of the guards," cried Henri; "call him instantly!"

"Why do you want your captain of the guards?" asked Chicot, passing his finger round the interior of the cup, then gently putting it between his lips.

"To pass his sword through Chicot's body, who, however thin he may be, will always make a roast for my dogs."

Chicot rose, and putting his cap on one side:—

"*Par la mordieu!*" he said. "Chicot to your dogs! a gentleman to your quadrupeds? Well, let him come, your captain of the guards, my son, and we shall see!"

Chicot drew his long sword, and used it so gayly against the hair-dresser, the barber, and the valet, that the king could not help laughing.

"But I am hungry," he said, in a doleful voice, "and the rascal has eaten up all my supper."

" You are capricious, Henri," said Chicot. " I offered to sit down with you, and you refused. At all events, here is your bouillon. I am no longer hungry, and I am going to bed."

During this time, old Gaspard has brought the key to his master.

" So am I," said Saint-Luc ; " if I remained standing any longer, I should be wanting in the respect I owe my king, and fall before him in a nervous fit. I have a chill."

" Here, Saint-Luc," said the king, handing the young man an armful of little dogs, " take these."

" What for ?"

" To sleep with you ; they will take your illness, and you will be rid of it."

" Thank you, sire," said Saint-Luc, putting them back in their basket, " but I have no confidence in your medication."

" I shall go and see you to-night, Saint-Luc," said the king.

" Oh, do not come, sire, I entreat you. You would wake me up suddenly, and I am told that gives epilepsy."

Thereupon, having saluted the king, he left the room, while Henri made him signs as long as he could see him.

Chicot had already disappeared. The two or three persons who had been present also withdrew in turn, and there remained with the king only the valet, who covered his face with a mask of fine linen coated with perfumed grease. Holes for the nose, the eyes, and the mouth had been left in the mask. A cap of silk and silver cloth held it on the brow and ears.

The king's arms were then put through a slip of pink satin lined with wadding and soft silk. He next put on gloves of such flexible skin that they seemed knitted. These gloves reached the elbows, and were saturated on the inside with perfumed oil, which gave them that elasticity, the cause of which could not be detected from the outside. These mysteries of the royal toilet being finished, they handed Henri his bouillon in a gold cup ; but before raising it to his lips, he poured off half into

another cup exactly similar to his own, and ordered it to be carried to Saint-Luc, to wish him a good night.

It was then God's turn ; but as the king was doubtless preoccupied that night, his Maker was rather lightly treated. Henri said but one short prayer, without even touching his sacred chaplets ; then opening his bed, warmed with benzoin, cinnamon, and coriander, he lay down.

When he was comfortably ensconced in his pillows, the king ordered the flowers, which thickened the atmosphere, to be taken away. The windows were opened for a few seconds to renew this air too saturated with carbon, after which a great fire of branches burned rapidly in the wide marble chimney, and, rapid as a meteor, was extinguished after having radiated a gentle heat throughout the whole room. Then the valet closed everything, curtains and portières, and let in the king's favorite dog, Narcissus. The animal bounded on the king's bed, turned around for an instant, then stretched himself across his master's feet.

The rose-colored tapers in the satyr's hand were now blown out, the lamp was lowered, and the valet who attended to these duties softly left the room.

Already more tranquil, more nonchalant, more forgetful than the lazy monks of his kingdom, in their fat abbeys, the king of France no longer remembered there was a France. He slept.

Half an hour later, the men who watched in the galleries, and who, from their different posts, could distinguish the windows of King Henri's chamber, saw through the curtains the royal lamp gradually die out. The silvery rays of the moon replaced on the windowpanes the soft pink light that had tinged them. They therefore thought that his Majesty slept better and better.

At this moment every noise was hushed, and one could have heard the most silent bat fly through the dark corridors of the Louvre.

CHAPTER VII.

HOW, WITHOUT APPARENT CAUSE, KING HENRI WAS SUDDENLY CONVERTED IN THE NIGHT.

Two hours passed thus. Suddenly a terrible cry was heard. This cry came from his Majesty's room.

As yet, however, the lamp was still extinguished, the silence was still profound, and no sound was to be heard save this strange call of the king's,—for it was the king who had cried out.

Soon after was heard the noise of falling furniture, porcelain breaking to pieces, hurried footsteps running about the room; then new cries, mingled with the barking of dogs. Almost immediately lights appeared, swords glittered in the galleries, and the heavy steps of the sleepy guards shook the massive pillars.

"To arms!" cried all; "to arms! the king calls. Let us go to the king."

At the same instant the captain of the guards, the captain of the Swiss, the attendants of the palace, the musketeers on duty, rushed to the royal chamber, which was immediately filled with light. Twenty torches illuminated the scene.

Near an overturned chair were broken cups; before the disordered bed, the sheets and covers of which were scattered about the room, Henri, grotesque and frightful in his night attire, stood, with his hair on end and his eyes staring.

His right hand was extended, trembling like a leaf in the wind; his left hand tightly grasped the handle of his sword, which he had mechanically seized.

The dog, as agitated as his master, stood looking at him, with his paws extended, and howled.

The king seemed mute with terror, and all the spectators, not daring to break the silence, questioned each other with their eyes, and waited with the most terrible anxiety.

Then appeared, half dressed and enveloped in a large cloak, the young queen, Louise de Lorraine, a blond and gentle creature, who led the life of a saint on earth, and who had been awakened by her husband's cries.

"Sire," she said, more trembling than all the rest, "what is the matter? *Mon Dieu!* I heard your cries, and I came."

"It—it—it is nothing," said the king, without moving his eyes, which seemed to be looking through the air at some vague form invisible to all but him.

"But your Majesty cried out," resumed the queen. "Is your Majesty ill?"

Terror was so visibly painted on Henri's face that it began to invade the others. They recoiled, they advanced, they devoured with their eyes the person of the king, to assure themselves that he had not been wounded, struck by lightning, or bitten by some reptile.

"Oh, sire," cried the queen, "sire, in the name of heaven, do not leave us in such anguish. Do you wish a physician?"

"A physician?" said Henri, in the same tone. "No the body is not ill,—it is the mind, it is the soul. No, no; no physician,—a confessor!"

They all looked at each other; they examined the floor, the doors, the curtains, the ceiling. Nowhere did they find a trace of the invisible object which had so greatly frightened the king.

This examination was made with increased curiosity; the mystery was becoming more complicated,—the king was calling for a confessor.

No sooner had this request been made than a messenger jumped on his horse and a thousand sparks flashed from the courtyard of the Louvre. Five minutes later Joseph Foulon, abbot of the convent of Sainte-Genevieve, was waked up, almost torn from his bed, and hurried to the king.

With the arrival of the confessor, the tumult ceased, silence was re-established; every one conjectured and

wondered ; every one hoped to guess, but all were afraid. The king was confessing.

The next morning, very early, Henri, who was the first to rise, ordered that the gate of the Louvre, which had only been partially opened to admit the confessor, should be closed again.

Then he sent for the treasurer, the wax-chandler, the master of ceremonies ; he took his prayer-book bound in black, read his prayers, interrupted himself to cut out images of saints, and suddenly sent for all his friends.

At his order, Saint-Luc was the first one summoned ; but Saint-Luc was suffering more than ever. He was languishing, overpowered with fatigue. His condition was now one of prostration, his sleep had degenerated into a lethargy which was so profound that alone of all the inmates of the palace, and though only separated from the prince by a thin wall, he had heard nothing of the scene of the night. Therefore he begged leave to remain in bed and read all the prayers the king might order.

At this deplorable news, Henri made the sign of the cross and sent for his apothecary.

Then he ordered that all the scourges from the monastery of Sainte-Genevieve be brought to the Louvre, and passing, dressed in black, before Schomberg who was lame, D'Epernon who had his arm in a sling, Quélus whose head still pained him, D'O and Maugiron who trembled, he gave them scourges, and ordered them to strike one another as hard as they could.

D'Epernon observed that having his right arm in a sling, he must be excepted from the ceremony, because he could not return the blows he would receive, and that would make a discord in this scale of flagellation. Henri III. replied that this would only make his penance all the more agreeable to God.

He himself gave the example. He took off his doublet, his vest, and his shirt, and struck himself like a martyr. Chicot wished to laugh and jest as was his custom, but a terrible look from the king warned him that it was not the right time ; he took a scourge like the others, only instead

of striking himself he beat his neighbors, and when he found no one within reach, he took the paint off the columns and woodwork.

All this tumult gradually caused the king's countenance to clear a little, though it was visible that his mind was deeply affected. All at once, he left the room, telling all those present to wait for him. As he disappeared, the blows ceased as by magic. Chicot alone continued to strike D'O whom he hated, and D'O returned the blows as well as he could. It was a duel with scourges.

Henri had gone to the queen. He presented her with a pearl necklace worth twenty-five thousand crowns, kissed her on both cheeks, which he had not done for a year, and begged her to lay aside her royal ornaments and wear sackcloth.

Louise de Lorraine, always gentle and good, immediately consented, but asked why her husband gave her the pearl necklace, and made so strange a request.

"For my sins," replied Henri.

This answer satisfied the queen; for she, better than any one, knew the enormous number of sins for which Henri had to do penance. She arrayed herself as the king requested, while he returned to his room, where she was to join him.

At the sight of the monarch, the flagellation began again. D'O and Chicot, who had not ceased, were covered with blood. The king complimented them, and called them his true and only friends. At the end of ten minutes, the queen appeared, with her sack on her shoulders.

Tapers were then distributed to the whole court, and barefooted, through the horrible snow and sleet, the fine courtiers, the fair ladies, the good Parisians, devoted to the king, and to Notre-Dame, went to Montmartre, shivering at first, but soon warmed by the furious blows which Chicot administered to all those who had the misfortune of being within reach of his discipline.

D'O acknowledged himself vanquished, and took his place in the procession fifty feet from Chicot.

At four o'clock in the afternoon the dismal journey was

over, the convents had received rich donations, the whole court had swollen feet, the backs of all the courtiers were sore ; the queen had appeared in public in an enormous shirt of coarse linen, the king with a chaplet of death's heads. There had been tears, cries, prayers, incense, hymns.

The day, as we see, had been good. In fact, every one had suffered from the cold and from blows, though no one could guess why that prince who had danced so gayly two days before, should now be macerating himself two days later.

The Huguenots, the Leaguers, and the libertines had laughed as they watched the procession of flagellators go by, saying deprecatingly that the last procession was finer and more fervent ; that was not true.

Henri had come home fasting, with long red and blue stripes on his shoulders ; he had not left the queen during the whole day, and had taken advantage of all the moments of rest, of all the stations at chapels, to promise her new revenues, and plan new pilgrimages with her.

As for Chicot, wearied of striking, and exhausted by the unusual exercise to which the king condemned him, he had escaped near the Porte Montmartre, and with Brother Gorenflot, that monk of Sainte-Genevieve who had wanted to confess Bussy, and who was one of his friends, he had entered the garden of a renowned public-house where he drank spiced wine, and ate a teal duck killed in the marshes of the Grange Batelière. Then, on the return of the procession, he resumed his place, and went back to the Louvre, scourging the penitents right and left, and distributing, as he said himself, his plenary indulgences.

When the evening came, the king felt wearied after his fast, his long walk barefooted, and the furious blows he had given himself. He ordered a light supper, and a bright fire in his room, had his shoulders sponged, and went in to visit Saint-Luc, whom he found well and cheerful.

The king was greatly changed since the day before : all

his thoughts were turned from the vanity of human things and tended towards penitence and death.

“ Ah,” he said in the tone of deep feeling of the man wearied of life, “ God has done wisely to make life so bitter.”

“ Why so, sire ? ” asked Saint-Luc.

“ Because the man who is wearied of this world, instead of fearing death, longs for it.”

“ Pardon me, sire,” said Saint-Luc, “ but speak for yourself ; I am not longing for death.”

“ Listen, Saint-Luc,” said the king, shaking his head ; “ if you did wisely, you would follow my advice,—nay, more, my example.”

“ Very willingly, sire, if I liked it.”

“ If I laid aside my crown, and you left your wife, we might enter a cloister ; I have the dispensations from our Holy Father the Pope ; to-morrow we shall make our profession of faith, I shall call myself Brother Henri.”

“ Pardon me, sire, pardon me ; you care very little for your crown that you know too well, but I care very much for my wife, whom I do not yet know well enough ; therefore, I refuse.”

“ Oh, oh ! ” said Henri, “ you are getting better, it seems.”

“ Infinitely better, sire ; my mind is easy and my heart joyful, my soul is most incredibly disposed to pleasure and happiness.”

“ Poor Saint-Luc ! ” said the king, clasping his hands.

“ You should have proposed that to me yesterday. Oh, yesterday, I was ill, cross, and suffering ; I should have thrown myself down a well for a trifle. But to-night everything is very different. I have spent a good night, a charming day. Eh ! *mordieu* ! I live for happiness.”

“ You swear, Saint-Luc,” said the king.

“ Did I swear, sire ? Very possibly ; but you swear sometimes yourself, it seems to me.”

“ I have sworn, Saint-Luc, but I shall swear no more.”

“ I do not dare say that ; I shall swear as little as possible, that is all I can say. Besides, God is good and

merciful when our sins are those of the weakness of the flesh."

" Do you think God will pardon me ? "

" Oh, I am not speaking for you, sire ; I am speaking for your humble servant. *Peste !* you, you have sinned as a king, while I have sinned as a private individual. I hope that on the judgment day, the Lord will have two weights and two measures."

The king sighed, murmured a *confiteor*, and beat his breast at the *mea culpa*.

" Saint-Luc," he said at length, " will you spend the night in my room ? "

" That depends," said Saint-Luc. " What shall we do in your Majesty's chamber ? "

" We shall light all the lamps, I shall go to bed, and you will read the litanies of the saints to me."

" No, I thank you, sire."

" You will not ? "

" On no account."

" You abandon me, Saint-Luc,—you abandon me ! "

" No, I do not leave you ; on the contrary."

" Ah, really ! "

" If you wish."

" Certainly, I wish it."

" But on one condition."

" What is it ? "

" That your Majesty will have tables prepared, send for music and ladies, and faith ! we shall dance."

" Saint-Luc, Saint-Luc ! " cried the king in terror.

" Well ! " said Saint-Luc, " I feel gay to-night. Will you drink and dance, sire ? "

But Henri did not reply. His mind, sometimes so lively and so quick, grew more and more gloomy, seeming to struggle against some secret thought that weighed upon it like a piece of lead tied to the foot of a bird that would vainly try to extend its wings in flight.

" Saint-Luc," finally said the king, in a funereal voice, " do you sometimes dream ? "

" Often, sire."

“ Do you believe in dreams ? ”

“ With reason.”

“ How so ? ”

“ Oh, yes ! dreams console for the reality. Now, last night I had a delightful dream.”

“ What was it ? ”

“ I dreamed that my wife—”

“ Do you still think of your wife, Saint-Luc ? ”

“ More than ever.”

“ Ah ! ” said the king, sighing, and raising his eyes to heaven.

“ I dreamed,” continued Saint-Luc, “ that my wife, though retaining her charming face,—for she is pretty, sire—”

“ Alas ! yes,” said the king. “ Eve was also beautiful, unhappy man ; and Eve ruined us all.”

“ So that is the cause of your spite ? But let us return to my dream, sire.”

“ I too have dreamed,” said the king.

“ Now, my wife, though retaining her pretty face, had taken the wings and form of a bird, and braving locks and bolts, she had passed over the walls of the Louvre, come to my window with a charming little cry that I understood and that said, ‘ Open, Saint-Luc ! open, my husband ! ’ ”

“ And you opened ? ” said the king, almost in despair.

“ I should think so ! ” cried Saint-Luc, “ and with alacrity.”

“ Worldly man ! ”

“ Worldly, as much as you please, sire.”

“ And you woke up then ? ”

“ No indeed, sire ; I took good care for that ; the dream was too charming.”

“ Then you continued to dream ”

“ So long as I could, sire.”

“ And you hope to-night—”

“ To dream again ; therefore, I refuse your Majesty’s charming offer to read prayers to you. If I sit up, sire, I must at least find the equivalent of my dream. If,

as I suggested, your Majesty orders the tables, the violins—

“Enough. Saint-Luc, enough!” said the king, rising. “You are going to perdition, and would drag me with you if I remained here any longer. Adieu, Saint-Luc, I trust Heaven will send you, instead of this tempting dream, some wholesome dream that will urge you to share my penance to-morrow for the salvation of our souls.”

“I doubt it, sire; and I am even so certain of it that if I have any advice to give you, it is to send away this very night that libertine Saint-Luc, who has resolved to die impenitent.”

“No,” said Henri, “no; I hope that before to-morrow grace will have entered your heart, as it has mine. Good-night, Saint-Luc; I will pray for you.”

“Good-night, sire; I shall dream for you.”

And Saint-Luc began to sing the first verse of a little song that the king was in the habit of singing in his moments of good-humor, and which hastened his flight. He closed the door and returned to his room, murmuring:

“O Lord, my God! your anger is just and lawful, for the world grows worse and worse.”

CHAPTER VIII.

HOW THE KING WAS AFRAID OF HAVING BEEN AFRAID,
AND HOW CHICOT WAS AFRAID OF BEING AFRAID.

WHEN the king left Saint-Luc, he found, in the great gallery, the court assembled according to his orders.

He then distributed a few favors to his friends. He ordered D’O, D’Epernon, and Schomberg to retire to the provinces, threatened Quélus and Maugiron with punishment if they had any more quarrels with Bussy, to whom he gave his hand to kiss, after which he pressed his brother François to his heart.

As for the queen, he overwhelmed her with attentions

to such a degree that all those present drew from it a more favorable augury for the succession to the crown of France.

However, the ordinary hour for retiring drew near, and it was easy to see that the king put off this hour as long as possible ; at last the great clock of the Louvre struck ten. Henri threw a long glance around him. He seemed undecided which one of his friends he would select to perform the duties that Saint-Luc had just refused. Chicot watched him.

“ See,” he said, with his usual boldness, “ you seem to be looking very sweetly at me to-night, Henri. Are you by any chance trying to get rid of some fat abbey of ten thousand livres income ? *Tudiable !* what a prior I would make ! Give, my son ! give ! ”

“ Come with me, Chicot,” said the king. “ Good-night, gentlemen, I am going to bed.”

Chicot turned to the courtiers, twisted his moustache, and with his most gracious air :—

“ Good-night, gentlemen,” he repeated, imitating Henri’s voice ; “ good-night, we are going to bed.”

The courtiers bit their lips ; the king reddened.

“ I want my barber,” said Chicot, “ my hair-dresser, my valet, and above all my cream.”

“ No,” said the king, “ there is no need of all that to-night ; we are about to begin Lent, and I am doing penance.”

“ I regret the cream,” said Chicot.

The king and the jester re-entered the room we have already seen.

“ Ah, Henri, am I, then, the favorite, the indispensable one ? I am therefore very handsome,—handsomer than that beautiful Cupid, Quélus ? ”

“ Silence ! buffoon,” said the king, “ and you, gentlemen of the toilet, you may go.”

The valets obeyed ; the door was closed. Henri and Chicot remained alone. Chicot looked at Henri with a sort of surprise.

“ Why do you send them away ? ” asked the jester ;

"they have not yet greased us. Do you intend to grease me with your royal hand ? Well, that may be as good a penance as any other."

Henri did not answer. Every one had left the room, and the two kings, the fool and the wise one, looked at each other.

" Let us pray," said Henri.

" Thank you," cried Chicot, " that is not amusing. If you made me come for that, I prefer returning to the bad company I have left. Adieu, my son, good-night."

" Remain," said the king.

" Oh, oh ! " said Chicot, drawing himself up, " this is becoming tyranny. You are a despot, a Phalaris, a Dionysius. I am bored to death here ; all day long you have made me tear the shoulders of my friends with a cow-hide, and now it seems we are about to begin again. *Peste !* let us not try it, Henri. We are but two, and every blow tells."

" Hush, miserable chatterer," said the king, " and think of repenting."

" Now, there we are. Repent—I ? And of what do you wish me to repent ? Of being jester to a monk ? *Confiteor*,—I repent ; *mea culpa*,—it is my fault, it is my fault, it is my very great fault ! "

" No sacrilege, wretch ! no sacrilege ! " said the king.

" Ah," said Chicot, " I would rather be shut up in a cage with lions and apes than be locked up with a mad king. Adieu, I am going."

The king took the key from the door.

" Henri," said Chicot, " you look sinister, and if you do not let me go out, I shall call, I shall scream, I shall break the door, I shall smash the window. Now, now ! "

" Chicot," said the king, in the most melancholy tone. " Chicot, my friend, you take advantage of my misery."

" Ah, I understand," said Chicot, " you are afraid to be alone ; tyrants are that way. Build yourself twelve rooms like Dionysius, or twelve palaces like Tiberius. In the meanwhile, take my long sword, and let me take the scabbard home."

At the word *afraid*, Henri's eyes flashed ; then with a strange shudder he rose and walked around the room.

There was so much agitation in Henri's body, his face was so pale, that Chicot began to think him really ill ; and after having seen him walk around the room three or four times in an excited way, he said to him :—

“ Come, my son, what is the matter ? Tell your troubles to your friend Chicot.”

The king stopped before the jester and looked at him.

“ Yes,” he said, “ you are my friend, my only friend.”

“ There is,” said Chicot, “ the abbey of Valencey vacant.”

“ Listen, Chicot,” said Henri ; “ you are discreet.”

“ There is also that of Pithiviers, where they make such excellent lark pies.”

“ In spite of your buffooneries,” said the king, “ you are a brave man.”

“ Then do not give me an abbey—give me a regiment.”

“ You are even a wise man.”

“ In that case, do not give me a regiment—make me a councillor ! But no, when I think of it, I should prefer a regiment or an abbey. I have no wish to be councillor ; for I should always be forced to be of the king's opinion.”

“ Hush, hush, Chicot ; the hour is approaching, the terrible hour.”

“ Ah, you are beginning again ? ”

“ You will see, you will hear.”

“ See what ? Hear what ? ”

“ Wait, and the event will tell you the things you wish to know.”

“ No, no, I shall not wait.”

“ Chicot, are you brave ? ”

“ I boast of it, but I do not prove my courage in this manner, *tudiable* ! When the monarch of France and Poland screams at night so as to cause a scandal in the Louvre, I, wretched man, am on the point of dishonoring your apartment. Adieu, Henri. Call your captain of the guards, your Swiss, your servants, and let me go. A

plague on invisible danger ! A plague on the unknown peril ! ”

“ I command you to remain,” said the king, with authority.

“ Upon my word, a nice master, who wishes to command fright. I am afraid, I tell you ; I am afraid. Help ! fire ! ”

And Chicot, no doubt to be above the danger, mounted on a table.

“ Now, rascal,” said the king, “ if it is necessary to make you hold your tongue, I shall tell you all.”

“ Ah, ah ! ” said Chicot, rubbing his hands, carefully descending from the table, and drawing his enormous sword ; “ once I am warned, it is all right. We shall rip him open. Tell, my son, tell. It seems it is some crocodile, eh ? *Tudiable !* my blade is good. I use it every week to cut my horns, and they are tough. You were saying, Henri, that it is a crocodile ? ”

And Chicot settled himself in a large armchair, placing his naked sword between his thighs, and winding his two legs round the blade as the two serpents, symbols of peace, are wound round Mercury’s caduceus.

“ Last night,” said Henri, “ I was sleeping—”

“ So was I,” said Chicot.

“ Suddenly, I felt a breath pass over my face.”

“ It was the dog, who was hungry, and who licked your grease.”

“ I half awoke, and felt my beard bristle with terror under my mask.”

“ Ah, you make me thrill most delightfully,” said Chicot, curling up in the armchair, and leaning his chin on the hilt of his sword.

“ Then,” said the king, in a tone so weak and trembling that the words scarcely reached Chicot’s ear, “ a voice sounded through the room with such a mournful vibration that my whole brain was shaken.”

“ The voice of the crocodile, yes. I have read in the voyages of Marco Polo that the crocodile has a terrible

voice that imitates the wailing of infants. But be easy, my son ; if he come, we shall kill him."

" Listen."

" *Pardieu !* I am listening," said Chicot, distending himself like a spring ; " I am as still as a pole, and mute as a fish."

Henri continued in a more doleful and lugubrious tone : " Miserable sinner ! " said the voice.

" Oh ! " interrupted Chicot, " the voice spoke ; then it was not a crocodile."

" Miserable sinner ! " said the voice. " I am the voice of the Lord thy God."

Chicot made a bound and was again crouching on his chair.

" The voice of God—" he said.

" Ah, Chicot," answered Henri, " it was a frightful voice."

" Was it a fine voice ? " asked Chicot. " Was it like the sound of a trumpet, according to Scripture ? "

" Are you there ? Do you hear ? " continued the voice. " Do you hear, hardened sinner ? Have you determined to persevere in your iniquities ? "

" Ah, really, really, really," said Chicot ; " but the voice of God greatly resembles that of the people, it seems to me."

" Then," resumed the king, " followed a thousand other reproaches, which, I assure you, Chicot, were very painful to me."

" Continue, my son, continue," said Chicot ; " tell me all that the voice said, that I may know if God was well informed."

" Impious wretch ! If you doubt, I shall have you chastised."

" I," said Chicot, " I do not doubt. I am only surprised that God should have waited so long before making these reproaches. He has become very patient since the flood. So, my son, you have had a dreadful fright," continued Chicot.

" Oh, yes ! " said Henri.

“ I am not surprised.”

“ The cold perspiration ran on my forehead, and the marrow was frozen in the depths of my bones.”

“ As in Jeremiah’s lamentations : it is very natural. Upon my word as a gentleman, I do not know what I would have done in your place. And then you called ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ And they came ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ And searched everywhere ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ No God ? ”

“ All had vanished.”

“ Save the king. That is truly frightful.”

“ So frightful that I called my confessor.”

“ Ah, and he came ? ”

“ At once.”

“ Now, let us see. Be frank, my son ; tell the truth for once. What did your confessor think of this revelation ? ”

“ He shuddered.”

“ I should think so.”

“ He crossed himself, and ordered me to repent as God had directed.”

“ Very well ; there is no harm in repenting. But what did he say of the vision itself, or rather of the audition ? ”

“ That it was providential, a miracle ; that I must think of saving the country. Therefore this morning—”

“ What did you do this morning, my son ? ”

“ I gave one hundred thousand livres to the Jesuits.”

“ Very well.”

“ I lacerated with a scourge my skin and that of the young courtiers.”

“ Very good ; but what then ? ”

“ What then ? What do you think of it, Chicot ? I am not speaking to the jester, but to the man of sense, to my friend.”

“ Ah, sire ! ” said Chicot, seriously, “ I think your Majesty has had the nightmare.”

“ You think so ? ”

“ Yes, I think it was a dream which will not be repeated unless your Majesty thinks too much about it.”

“ A dream ? ” said Henri, shaking his head. “ No, no ! I was awake, I assure you, Chicot.”

“ You were asleep, Henri.”

“ I was so little asleep that my eyes were wide open.”

“ I sleep like that.”

“ Yes ; but I saw with my eyes, which is not the case when we sleep.”

“ And what did you see ? ”

“ I saw the moon shining through my windows. I looked at the bright amethyst in the hilt of my sword, which lay in that same chair where you are.”

“ What had become of the lamp ? ”

“ It had gone out.”

“ A dream, my son ; it was but a dream ! ”

“ Why will you not believe, Chicot ? Have you never heard that God speaks to kings when he wishes to make some great change on earth ? ”

“ Yes, he speaks to them, but so low that they never hear him.”

“ But what makes you so incredulous ? ”

“ The fact of your having heard so well.”

“ Well, do you understand why I made you stay ? ” said the king.

“ Parbleu ! ” answered Chicot.

“ That you may hear the voice yourself ! ”

“ So that if I repeat what I hear it may be thought that I utter some buffoonery. Chicot is so insignificant, so unimportant, so mad, that if he should tell it no one will believe it. Not badly played, my son ! ”

“ Why should you not believe, my friend,” said the king, “ that I confide this secret to your well-known fidelity ? ”

“ Ah, do not lie, Henri ! If the voice come, it will reproach you with that falsehood, and your other iniquities are sufficiently numerous. No matter, I accept the task.

I shall not be sorry to hear the voice of the Lord ; he may perhaps say something for me."

" What must be done ? "

" You must go to bed, my son."

" But if, on the contrary—"

" No ' ifs.' "

" But—"

" Do you fancy, perchance, that by remaining up you might prevent the voice of God from speaking ? A king surpasses other men only by the height of his crown ; and when he is bareheaded, believe me, Henri, he is of the same size, and sometimes a little smaller than other men."

" Well, then, you remain ? " said the king.

" Yes."

" Then, I am going to bed."

" Good ! "

" But will you not ? "

" Surely not."

" I shall only remove my doublet."

" Do as you please."

" I shall keep on my hose."

" The precaution is good."

" What will you do ? "

" I shall remain where I am."

" And you will not sleep ? "

" As for that, I cannot promise. Sleep is like fear, my son,—a thing independent of our will."

" You will at least do what you can."

" I shall pinch myself, if necessary ; besides, the voice will awaken me."

" Do not jest with the voice ! " said Henri, who had already one leg in bed and drew it out.

" Come," said Chicot, " must I put you to bed ? "

The king sighed, and having anxiously examined all the corners of the room, he glided tremblingly between his sheets.

" Now," said Chicot, " it is my turn."

He settled himself in the armchair, arranging pillows and cushions around him.

“ How do you feel, sire ? ”

“ Quite well,” said the king ; “ and you ? ”

“ Very well. Good-night, Henri.”

“ Good-night, Chicot ; do not go to sleep.”

“ *Peste !* I should think not,” said Chicot, yawning enough to break his jaws. Both closed their eyes,—the king to pretend that he slept, Chicot to sleep in reality.

CHAPTER IX.

HOW THE VOICE OF THE LORD MADE A MISTAKE AND SPOKE TO CHICOT, THINKING HE WAS THE KING.

THE king and Chicot remained motionless and silent for the space of ten minutes. All at once the king started and sat up in bed. At this noise and motion, which interrupted that delightful drowsiness which precedes sleep, Chicot did the same. They both looked at each other with flashing eyes.

“ What is it ? ” asked Chicot, in a low voice.

“ The breath ! ” said the king, in a still lower voice ; “ the breath ! ”

At the same moment one of the tapers held by the golden satyr went out, then a second, then a third, then finally the last.

“ Oh, oh,” said Chicot, “ what a breath ! ”

Chicot had hardly uttered the last of these syllables when the lamp was extinguished in turn, and the last gleams of the dying fire alone lighted the room.

“ Attention ! ” said Chicot, standing up.

“ He will speak ! ” said the king, crouching in his bed ; “ he will speak ! ”

“ Well, listen ! ” said Chicot.

At that moment was heard a hollow voice, coming at intervals from the recess behind the bed,—

“ Hardened sinner, are you there ? ”

“ Yes, yes, O Lord ! ” said Henri, with chattering teeth.

"Oh, oh!" said Chicot, "that is a very hoarse voice to come from Heaven. No matter, it is gruesome."

"Do you hear me?" said the voice.

"Yes, Lord, and I am bowed under thy wrath."

"Do you believe," continued the voice, "that you obeyed me by all the exterior mummeries you performed to-day, when your heart was not really touched to its depths?"

"Well said!" cried Chicot; "well hit!"

The king's hands shook, as he clasped them. Chicot softly approached him.

"Well," murmured Henri, "well, do you believe now, you wretch?"

"Wait," said Chicot.

"What do you want?"

"Silence! Listen! Slip gently out of bed, and let me get in your place!"

"Why so?"

"That the anger of the Lord may first fall upon me."

"Do you think he will spare me for that reason?"

"Let us try;" and with affectionate firmness he gently pushed the king out of bed, and took his place.

"Now, Henri," he said, "go to my chair, and leave all to me."

Henri obeyed; he was beginning to guess.

"You do not reply," resumed the voice; "a proof that you are hardened in sin."

"Oh, pardon me, pardon me, O Lord!" said Chicot, imitating the king's nasal tones. Then leaning towards Henri, he said,—

"It is strange! Do you observe, my son, the good Lord doesn't recognize Chicot?"

"Yes," said Henri. "What can it mean?"

"Wait, wait, and you will see much more."

"Wretch!" said the voice.

"Yes, Lord, yes," said Chicot, "I am a hardened sinner, a dreadful sinner."

"Then acknowledge your crimes, and repent."

" I acknowledge to have been a great traitor to my cousin Condé, whose wife I seduced, and I repent."

" What are you saying ? " murmured the king. " Will you hush ? All that was so long ago."

" Ah, really ! " said Chicot, " let us pass to something else."

" Speak ! " said the voice.

" I acknowledge, " continued the false Henri, " to have been a great rogue to the Poles, who had elected me king, and whom I abandoned one night, carrying away all the crown jewels, and I repent."

" Ah, rascal ! " said Henri, " why do you recall that ? It is forgotten."

" I must continue to deceive him, " continued Chicot ; " leave me alone."

" Speak ! " said the voice.

" I acknowledge, " said Chicot, " having stolen the throne of France from my brother D'Alençon, to whom it belonged by right, since I had formally renounced it on accepting the throne of Poland, and I repent."

" Villain ! " said the king.

" That is not all, " said the voice.

" I acknowledge having combined with my good mother, Catherine de Médicis, to drive out of France my brother-in-law, the King of Navarre, after having destroyed all his friends, and my sister, Queen Marguerite, after having destroyed all her lovers, for which I sincerely repent."

" Ah, knave that you are ! " murmured the king, gnashing his teeth in anger.

" Sire, let us not offend God by endeavoring to conceal what he knows as well as we do."

" Leave politics aside, " pursued the voice.

" Ah, here we are ! " said Chicot, in a most lamentable tone. " You mean my morals, do you not ? "

" I do, " said the voice.

" It is true, O God ! " said Chicot, still speaking in the king's name, " that I am very effeminate, lazy, idle, stupid, and hypocritical."

" That is true," said the voice, in sepulchral tones.

" I have ill-treated women,—my wife most particularly ; so worthy a woman."

" Man should love his wife like himself, and prefer her to all things," said the furious voice.

" Ah," cried Chicot, in a despairing tone, " then I have greatly sinned ! "

" And you have caused others to sin by your example."

" That is true,—most true ! "

" You have almost condemned that poor Saint-Luc to eternal damnation."

" Bah ! " said Chicot, " are you quite sure, O Lord ! that he is not altogether damned ? "

" No, but that might happen to him, and to you also, if you do not send him back to his family to-morrow morning at the latest."

" Ah, ah ! " said Chicot to the king, " the voice seems to be friendly to the house of Cossé."

" And if you do not make him a duke, and his wife a duchess," continued the voice, " as a reward for her days of premature widowhood—"

" And if I do not obey ? " said Chicot, showing a slight resistance in his voice.

" If you do not obey," resumed the voice, rising to dreadful proportions, " you will cook for eternity in the vast caldron in which Sardanapalus, Nebuchadnezzar, and the Maréchal de Retz are already cooking while awaiting your company."

Henri groaned. At this threat his terror became greater than ever.

" *Peste !*" said Chicot, " do you observe, Henri, how much Heaven is interested in M. de Saint-Luc ? The devil take me ! but we might say that he has the good Lord in his sleeve."

But Henri did not hear Chicot's buffooneries, or if he did, they failed to reassure him.

" I am lost ! " he cried, wildly ; " I am lost ! This voice from on high will cause my death."

" Voice from on high ! " said Chicot. " Ah, this time you are mistaken. It is a voice from the side."

" How ! voice from the side ? " asked Henri.

" Yes, can you not hear, my son, that the voice comes from that wall ? Henri, the good Lord lodges in the Louvre. Probably, like the good Emperor Charles V., he passes through France on his way to hell."

" Atheist ! blasphemer ! "

" It is honorable for you, Henri ; therefore I congratulate you. But you seem to appreciate the honor but little. What ! the Lord is in the Louvre, he is only separated from you by the thickness of a wall, and you do not go and make him a visit ? Come, Valois, I do not recognize you there, and you are not polite."

At that moment a stick hidden in the ashes of the hearth took fire, and the flame that lit up the room showed Chicot's face.

This face wore such an expression of amusement and mockery that the king was surprised.

" What ! " he said, " you have the heart to laugh ! you dare—"

" Oh, yes, I dare ; and you will dare yourself, in a moment. Reason with yourself, my son, and do as I tell you."

" I must go and see—"

" If the good Lord be not really in the next room."

" But if the voice speak again ? "

" Am I not here to answer ? It is even better that I should be here, and continue speaking in your name ; that will allow the voice that takes me for you to believe that you are still here, and that divine voice is most wonderfully credulous not to know better. What ! I have been braying here for a quarter of an hour, and I have not been recognized ! That is not clever."

Henri frowned ; Chicot had said so much that even his great faith had been shaken.

" I think you are right, Chicot," he said, " and I have a great mind to—"

" Go ! " said Chicot, pushing him.

Henri softly opened the door of the corridor leading to the next room, which was, as we remember, formerly inhabited by Charles IX.'s nurse, and was now occupied by Saint-Luc ; but he had scarcely taken four steps in the corridor when he heard the voice increase its reproaches, and Chicot whining most piteously in reply.

" Yes," continued the voice, " you are as changeable as a woman, as self-indulgent as a Sybarite, as corrupt as a heathen."

" Ah," whined Chicot, " is it my fault, *mon Dieu*, if I have such a soft skin, such white hands, such a fine nose, such a changeable mind ? But all is over, *mon Dieu*, from this day. I shall wear only coarse shirts. I shall bury myself in dung, like Job."

In the meantime, Henri advanced along the corridor, observing with admiration that as Chicot's voice grew fainter, that of his interlocutor grew stronger, and that the voice really seemed to proceed from Saint-Luc's room.

He was about to knock at the door when he perceived a ray of light filtering through the carved keyhole. He stooped down and looked through. Henri, who was very pale, suddenly grew red with anger, raised his eyes the better to see that for which he could not credit his senses.

" *Par la mordieu !*" he murmured, " is it possible that any one has dared to play me such a trick ? "

This is what he saw through the keyhole. In one corner of the room stood Saint-Luc, arrayed in silk trousers and a dressing-gown, roaring through a tube the threatening words which the king had taken for menaces from Heaven ; and beside him, leaning on his shoulder, clad in a diaphanous white garment, was a young woman, who every now and then snatched the tube from his hand, and changing her voice, shouted through it all the nonsense prompted by her laughing eyes. Every speech was followed by stifled bursts of laughter, because Chicot wept and lamented himself in such a manner that the king might have believed he heard his own self weeping and complaining, so perfect was Chicot's imitation.

" Jeanne de Cossé in Saint-Luc's room ! A hole in the wall ! Such a trick on me !" muttered Henri. " Oh, the wretches ! They will pay for this ! "

And after a more insulting phrase spoken through the tube by Madame de Saint-Luc, Henri moved back one step, and with a very vigorous kick for so effeminate a man, he burst open the door, the hinges and lock of which were half broken.

Jeanne, half-undressed, gave one shriek, and hid herself behind the curtains of the bed, which she wrapped round herself.

Saint-Luc, pale with terror, and holding the tube in his hand, dropped on his knees before the king, who was pale with anger.

" Ah," cried Chicot from the royal chamber, " ah, mercy ! Holy Virgin ! Saints in heaven ! I am dying ! "

But in the next room, none of the actors of the burlesque scene we have just described had yet found the strength to speak, the situation having so quickly become tragic.

Henri broke the silence with one word and gesture.

" Go !" he said, pointing to the door.

Then yielding to a movement of rage, unworthy of a king, he snatched the tube from Saint-Luc's hand and raised it as if to strike ; but Saint-Luc jumped up as if moved by a spring.

" Sire," he said, " I am a gentleman ; you only have the right to strike my head."

Henri dashed the tube violently to the ground. Some one picked it up. It was Chicot, who, having heard the noise of the broken door, and judging that the presence of a mediator would not be useless, had rushed upon the scene.

He left Saint-Luc and Henri to settle the matter as they chose, and went to the curtain behind which he suspected some one was concealed. He drew out poor Jeanne, all trembling.

" Well, well !" he said, " Adam and Eve after the fall.

You send them away, Henri?" questioning the king with a look.

"Yes," said Henri.

"Then I shall be the avenging angel." And throwing himself between the king and Saint-Luc, he waved the tube like a flaming sword over the heads of the guilty couple, saying,—

"This is my paradise which you have lost by your disobedience. I forbid you to return to it."

Then leaning towards Saint-Luc, who had his arm around his wife to protect her from the king's anger if need be, he whispered,—

"If you have a good horse, kill it, but be twenty leagues from here by to-morrow."

CHAPTER X.

HOW BUSSY WENT IN SEARCH OF HIS DREAM, WHICH HE BELIEVED TO BE A REALITY.

Bussy went home with the Duc d'Anjou, both being in a dream,—the duke because he feared the consequences of the act to which he had been in a measure forced by Bussy; Bussy because the events of the preceding night occupied him above everything.

"Well," he said to himself, as he reached his house, after bestowing many compliments on the duke for the energy displayed by the latter, "well, I am certain of having been attacked, of having fought, of having been wounded; I even feel the wound, which is very painful. Now, while I fought I could see, as I see before me, the Croix des Petits-Champs; I could see the wall of the Hôtel des Tournelles, and the battlemented towers of the Bastille. It was on the Place de la Bastille, a little forward of the Hôtel des Tournelles, between the Rue Sainte-Catherine and the Rue Saint-Paul, that I was attacked, since I was on my way to the Faubourg Saint-

Antoine to get the Queen of Navarre's letter. I was attacked there, near a door with a barbican, through which, after the door was closed, I saw Quélus, whose cheeks were so pale and whose eyes were so bright. I was in an alley ; at the end of the alley was a staircase. I felt the first step, since I stumbled against it. Then I fainted ; then my dream began ; then I found myself in a very cold wind, lying near the moat of the Temple, between a monk, a butcher, and an old woman. Now, why do my other dreams fade so quickly and so completely from my memory, whereas this one becomes more and more vivid as time goes by. Ah," said Bussy, " that is the mystery!!!"

He stopped before the door of his *hôtel* which he had just reached, and leaning against the wall, he closed his eyes.

" *Morbleu !* " he said, " it is impossible that a dream should have left so vivid an impression on my mind. I see the room with its figured tapestry, I see the painted ceiling, I see my carved oak bedstead with the white and gold damask curtains ; I see the portrait, I see the golden-haired lady (I am less certain that the woman and the portrait are not the same thing) ; finally, I can see the cheerful and kindly face of the young physician who was conducted blindfolded to my bedside. Surely, I have enough indications. Let us recapitulate ; a tapestry, a ceiling, a carved bedstead, white and gold damask curtains, a portrait, a woman, and a doctor. Come, come, I must set out in search of all this ; and unless I am the greatest of fools, I must find them all. And to begin the work," continued Bussy, " I must get a costume more suitable for a night wanderer, and then to the Bastille ! "

In virtue of this resolution, rather unreasonable on the part of a man, who, after having been nearly assassinated in one place, returns the next day, at almost the same hour, to explore this same spot. Bussy entered his house, had the bandage of his wound rearranged by a valet who had some knowledge of surgery, put on long boots which reached far above his knees, took his strongest sword, wrapped himself up in his cloak, entered his litter, had

himself conveyed to the end of the Rue du Roi de Sicile, got out, ordered his servants to wait for him, and walking down the Rue Saint-Antoine, reached the Place de la Bastille.

It was about nine o'clock at night ; the curfew had rung ; Paris seemed deserted. Thanks to the milder temperature and a little sunshine, the puddles of icy water and the muddy holes transformed the Place de la Bastille into a space abounding in lakes and precipices which the pathway of which we have spoken surrounded like a causeway.

Bussy looked about him. He examined the place where his horse had fallen, and thought he had found it ; he made the same motions of attack and retreat, which he remembered ; he went to the wall, and examined every door to find the angle against which he had leaned, and the wicket through which he had looked at Quélus. But all the doors had an angle and nearly all had a wicket ; there was an alley behind all the doors. Through a circumstance which will seem less extraordinary when we think that at this period *concierges* were practically unknown, three fourths of the doors had alleys.

“ *Pardieu !* ” said Bussy, with great vexation, “ if I am obliged to knock at every door and question all the inhabitants, if I must spend one thousand crowns to loosen the tongues of the valets and old women, I shall know what I wish to know. There are fifty houses ; by counting ten houses an evening, I would lose five evenings, —only I shall wait until the weather is a little more dry.”

Bussy was finishing this soliloquy when he perceived a little pale and trembling light which came nearer and was reflected in the puddles of water like a beacon-light at sea. This light approached slowly and irregularly, stopping from time to time, moving now to the right and now to the left, stumbling all at once, and dancing like a will-o'-the-wisp, then for a minute coming straight on, then again diverging.

“ Positively,” said Bussy, “ the Place de la Bastille is a singular spot ; but never mind, let us wait.”

And Bussy, to wait more comfortably, wrapped himself in his cloak and concealed himself in the angle of a doorway. The night was very black ; one could scarcely see four paces ahead.

The lantern continued to advance, performing the wildest evolutions ; but as Bussy was not superstitious, he was convinced that the light he saw was not one of those wandering fires which so greatly frightened the travellers of the Middle Ages, but purely and simply a lantern, suspended from a hand, which hand was attached to some body.

In fact, after waiting a few seconds, this surmise proved to be true. Bussy perceived at thirty paces, a black form, long and slim as a pole ; the form gradually assumed the shape and proportions of a human being, holding the lantern in his left hand, which was sometimes extended in front of him, sometimes at his side, and sometimes hung along his body. This human being appeared for the moment to belong to the honorable fraternity of drunkards, for nothing else could explain the eccentric movements of the lantern, and the philosophy with which he stumbled in the muddy holes and splashed about in the puddles.

He slipped once on a piece of ice, and a dull thud, accompanied by an involuntary movement of the lantern, which seemed to go suddenly downwards, indicated to Bussy that the nocturnal rambler, being very unsteady on his feet, had sought a more solid centre of gravity.

Bussy began to feel that sort of respect which fills every noble heart at the sight of a belated drunkard, and he was about to go to the assistance of this "priest of Bacchus," as Ronsard would say, when he saw the lantern rise again with a rapidity which indicated, in the one who used it so badly, a greater solidity than might have been expected at first sight.

"Well," murmured Bussy, "another adventure, it seems."

And as the lantern moved on once more, and came

straight towards him, he went deeper into the angle of the door.

The lantern advanced a few steps nearer, and Bussy perceived a strange thing,—the man who carried it was blindfolded.

“Pardieu!” he said, “what a singular idea to play blind-man’s-buff with a lantern, particularly in such weather and on such ground. Am I dreaming again, perchance ?”

Bussy waited, and the man with the bandaged eyes came a little nearer.

“Good heavens !” said Bussy, “I believe he is talking to himself. Well, he is neither drunk nor mad ; he is a mathematician trying to solve a problem.”

This last surmise was suggested to the observer by the last words spoken by the man and heard by Bussy.

“Four hundred and eighty-eight, four hundred and eighty-nine, four hundred and ninety !” murmured the man with the lantern ; “it must be very near here.”

And then, with his right hand, the mysterious personage raised his bandage ; and finding himself in front of a house, he approached the door. Having reached it, he examined it attentively.

“No,” he said, “it is not this one.”

Then pulling down his bandage, he resumed his walk and his calculations.

“Four hundred and ninety-one, four hundred and ninety-two, four hundred and ninety-three, four hundred and ninety-four ! I must be nearly there.”

He again raised his bandage, and approaching the door next to the one where Bussy was hidden, he examined it no less carefully than the first.

“Hum !” he said, “that might be. No, yes—yes, no ! Those devilish doors are all so alike !”

“I had just thought the same thing,” said Bussy to himself. “That gives me some consideration for the mathematician.”

The mathematician replaced his bandage and continued his walk.

"Four hundred and ninety-five, four hundred and ninety-six, four hundred and ninety-seven, four hundred and ninety-eight, four hundred and ninety-nine! If there is a door in front of me, it must be the one."

There was, in fact, a door, and this door was the one where Bussy was concealed; therefore, when the mathematician raised his bandage, he and Bussy stood facing each other.

"Well?" said Bussy.

"Oh!" said the man, stepping back.

"Really!" said Bussy.

"It is not possible!" cried the unknown.

"Yes; only it is extraordinary. You are the doctor?"

"And you the gentleman?"

"Exactly."

"*Mon Dieu!* What luck!"

"The doctor," continued Bussy, "who was brought last night to see a gentleman wounded in the side?"

"In the right side."

"Yes; I recognized you at once; your hand was so gentle, so light, and at the same time so skilful."

"Ah, monsieur, I did not expect to find you here."

"What were you looking for?"

"The house."

"Ah," said Bussy, "you were looking for the house?"

"Yes."

"You did not know it?"

"How could I know?" answered the young man.
"I was brought hither blindfolded."

"You were brought blindfolded?"

"Certainly."

"Then you really came to this house?"

"To this one, or one of the adjoining houses; I cannot tell, as I am looking for it."

"Then I did not dream?"

"How? Did you not dream?"

"I confess, my dear friend, that I thought all this adventure was a dream,—except the wound, of course."

" Well," said the young doctor, " you do not surprise me, monsieur."

" Why so ? "

" I thought there was some mystery in this affair."

" Yes, my friend, a mystery which I must bring to light. You will help me, will you not ? "

" Willingly."

" But first, two words."

" Speak."

" What is your name ? "

" Monsieur," said the young doctor, " I shall make no ceremony about telling you. I suppose that, according to the customs of society, I ought to stand proudly before you and say, ' Yours, monsieur, if you please.' But you have a long sword, and I only a lancet. You look like a gentleman, and I must look like a rogue, for I am wet to the skin and muddy to the waist ; therefore, I shall frankly reply to your question,—I am called Rémy le Haudoïn."

" Very well, monsieur ; many thanks. I am Louis de Clermont, Comte de Bussy."

" Bussy d'Amboise ! the hero Bussy ! " joyfully cried the young doctor. " What ! monsieur, you are that famous Bussy, that colonel who— Oh ! "

" I am, monsieur," modestly replied the gentleman ; " and now that we know each other, wet and dirty though you are, will you satisfy my curiosity ? "

" The fact is," said the young man, looking at his mud-covered hose,— " the fact is, I shall be obliged, like Epaminondas the Theban, to stay at home for three days, as I possess but one suit of clothes. But pardon me ! you did me the honor to question me, I think ? "

" Yes, monsieur ; I was about to ask you how you came to this house."

" It is very simple and at the same time very complicated, as you will see," said the young man.

" Go on."

" Pardon me, Monsieur le Comte, if I did not give you your title, but I was so confused that I forgot."

“ Never mind—continue.”

“ Monsieur le Comte, this is what happened ; I reside on the Rue Beauteillis, five hundred and two steps from here. I am a poor surgeon, but not unskilful, I hope.”

“ I know something of that,” said Bussy.

“ And I have studied much, but without getting any patients. I am called, as I told you, Rémy le Haudoin ; Rémy is my Christian name, and Le Haudoin the name of the place where I was born,—Nanteuil le Haudoin. Seven or eight days ago, a man having received, behind the Arsenal, a stab with a knife, I sewed up the skin of his abdomen and neatly replaced therein his wandering bowels. That gave me a certain reputation in the neighborhood, to which I attribute the honor of having been awakened last night by a flute-like voice.”

“ A woman’s voice ? ” cried Bussy.

“ Yes, monsieur ; but rustic though I be, I am sure it was the voice of a servant. I know them well, since I have heard more of these voices than ladies’ voices.”

“ What did you do ? ”

“ I rose and opened my door ; but I had scarcely reached the threshold when two little hands, not very soft, but not very hard, put a bandage over my eyes.”

“ Without saying a word ? ”

“ Yes ; she said to me, ‘ Come ! Do not try to see whither you are going ; be discreet. Here is your reward.’ ”

“ And this reward was—”

“ A purse, which she placed in my hand.”

“ Ah ! ah ! And what did you answer ? ”

“ That I was ready to follow my charming guide. I did not know if she was charming or not, but I thought that the epithet, though possibly exaggerated, could do no harm.”

“ And you followed without making any remarks, without asking any guarantees ? ”

“ I have often read stories of this kind in books, and I observed that something good for the physician was always the result. I followed, as I had the honor of

telling you. I walked on a hard soil ; it was freezing, and I counted four hundred, four hundred and fifty, five hundred, and finally five hundred and two steps."

"Good !" said Bussy, " that was prudent. Then this must be the door ? "

" I cannot be far from it, since I counted this time four hundred and ninety-nine ; unless the cunning vixen led me by a round-about way, which I half suspect her to have done."

" Yes ; but even supposing she had taken that precaution," said Bussy, " she must have spoken some name or given some sign."

" None."

" But you must have observed something ? "

" I observed all I could observe with fingers that have sometimes taken the place of eyes,—that is, a door with nails ; behind this door an alley ; at the end of the alley a staircase."

" On the left ? "

" Exactly ; I even counted the steps."

" How many ? "

" Twelve."

" And you then entered—"

" A corridor, I believe, for they opened three doors.

" Well ? "

" Then I heard another voice. Ah, that one, I am sure, belonged to the mistress. It was sweet and gentle."

" Yes, yes, it was hers ! "

" Well, it was hers."

" I am sure of it."

" It is good to be sure of one thing. I was then pushed into the room where you lay, and was told to remove my bandage."

" That is it."

" I then saw you."

" Where was I ? "

" Lying on a bed."

" A bed of white and gold damask ? "

“ Yes.”
“ In a room hung with tapestry ? ”
“ Exactly.”
“ And a painted ceiling ? ”
“ Yes ; moreover, between the two windows— ”
“ A portrait ? ”
“ Of great beauty.”
“ Representing a woman about eighteen or twenty ? ”
“ Yes.”
“ Blond ? ”
“ Yes.”
“ Fair as the angels ? ”
“ Fairer.”
“ Bravo ! What did you then do ? ”
“ I dressed your wound.”
“ And upon my soul, you did it well ! ”
“ As well as I could.”
“ Admirably, my dear monsieur, admirably. This morning it was nearly closed.”

“ That is owing to a salve I have compounded and which to me appears sovereign ; for many times, not knowing on whom to try experiments, I have wounded myself in different places, and these wounds were always closed within two or three days.”

“ My dear Monsieur Rémy,” cried Bussy, “ you are a charming man, and I have taken a great liking to you. Well, what next ? ”

“ You fainted again, and the voice asked me how you were.”

“ Whence came the voice ? ”

“ From a room at the side.”

“ So you did not see the lady ? ”

“ Not even a glimpse.”

“ And you replied ? ”

“ That the wound was not dangerous, and in twenty-four hours would be well.”

“ She seemed pleased ? ”

“ Delighted, for she cried : ‘ *Mon Dieu !* how fortunate.’ ”

" She said, ' How fortunate ! ' My dear Monsieur Rémy, I will make your fortune. Well ? Well ? "

" That was all. Your wound was dressed and I had nothing more to do. The voice then said to me : ' Monsieur Rémy—'"

" The voice knew your name ? "

" Yes, on account of the man I had sewed up."

" Ah, of course. The voice said, ' Monsieur Rémy—'"

" Monsieur Rémy, be a man of honor to the last. Do not compromise a poor woman carried away by an excess of humanity. Replace your bandage, and allow yourself to be led straight home, "

" You promised ? "

" I pledged my word."

" And you kept it ? "

" As you see," simply replied the young man, " for I am now seeking the door."

" Well," cried Bussy, " you did well ; and though I am most disappointed, I cannot help saying, Your hand, Monsieur Rémy," and Bussy cordially extended his hand to the young doctor.

" Monsieur," said Rémy, embarrassed.

" Your hand ; you are worthy of being a gentleman."

" Monsieur," said Rémy, " it will be an eternal glory for me to have touched the hand of Bussy d'Amboise. However, I have a scruple."

" What is it ? "

" There were ten pistoles in the purse."

" Well ? "

" That is too much for a man who charges five sous for his visits when he does not give them for nothing. I was seeking the house—"

" To return the purse ? "

" Exactly."

" My dear Monsieur Rémy, that is too much delicacy, I assure you ; you have honorably earned the money, and you may keep it."

" You think so ? " said Rémy, inwardly well pleased.

" I am quite sure ; only it is not the lady who should

have paid you. I do not know her, nor does she know me."

" That is another reason, you see."

" I only meant to say that I also owe you a debt."

" You owe me a debt ? "

" Yes, and I shall pay it. What are you doing in Paris ? Come—speak—give me your confidence, my dear Monsieur Rémy."

" What am I doing in Paris ? Nothing at all, Monsieur le Comte ; but I would do something if I had patients."

" Good ! That is fortunate. I will give you a patient. Will you have me ? I am a famous practice, for scarcely a day passes when I do not deteriorate in others God's noblest work, or others do it with me. Come, will you undertake to mend all the holes made in my skin, or all those that I shall make in that of others ? "

" Ah, Monsieur le Comte," said Rémy, " I am too unworthy."

" No, on the contrary, you are the very man I need. Your hand is as light as a woman's, and with your salve—"

" Monsieur ! "

" You shall come and live with me. You shall have your own rooms, your own servants. Accept, or upon my word, my feelings will be deeply hurt. Besides, your task is not over ; I must have a second dressing for my wound, dear Monsieur Rémy."

" Monsieur le Comte," replied the young doctor, " I am so delighted that I do not know how to express my gratitude, my joy. I will work, I will have patients."

" No, since I take you for myself alone,—with my friends, that is understood. Now, do you remember nothing else ? "

" Nothing."

" Ah, well ! help me to find out, if possible."

" What ? "

" Come, you are an observing man,—you who count the steps, feel the walls, and notice the voices. How can

you explain the fact that after having been doctored by you, I was carried out of this house to the Temple, close to a ditch?"

" You ? "

" Yes, I. Did you help to carry me there ? "

" Not at all ! I should have opposed it, had they consulted me. The cold might have done you much harm."

" Then I am in the dark. Will you not search a little more with me ? "

" I wish all that you wish, monsieur ; I only fear it will be useless. All these houses are alike."

" Well, we must come again by day."

" Yes ; but we shall be seen."

" Then we must inquire."

" We will, monseigneur."

" And we shall succeed. Believe me, Rémy, we are now two, and we have a reality to work upon."

CHAPTER XI.

M. BRYAN DE MONSOREAU, MASTER OF THE HOUNDS.

It was more than joy, it was almost delirium that agitated Bussy, when he had acquired the certainty that the woman of his dream was a reality, and that this woman had given him that generous hospitality, a dim remembrance of which he had preserved in his heart.

Therefore, he would not lose sight of the young man whom he had just taken as his own private physician. He made him, dirty as he was, enter the litter with him. He feared to let Rémy leave him for an instant, lest he too should vanish like the other vision. He intended to conduct him to the Hôtel Bussy, keep him under lock and key for the night, and reflect the next morning before setting him free. All the way home, Bussy asked questions, but all the answers came within the narrow circle we have already traced. Rémy le Haudoin knew little more than Bussy himself, unless it were

the certainty that, not having fainted, he could not have dreamed.

But for every man who is beginning to fall in love, as Bussy was visibly doing, it is a great deal to have some one with whom to talk of the loved one. Rémy had not seen this woman, but that was all the better for Bussy, who tried to make him understand how she was in every way more beautiful than her portrait. He would have liked to talk all night of the unknown lady, but Rémy beginning his functions at once, insisted that his patient should sleep, or at least go to bed. Fatigue and pain gave the same counsel, and these three united powers carried the point, but not before Bussy had accompanied his new friend to three rooms which had formerly been his own, and which formed a portion of the third floor of the Hôtel Bussy. Then, being sure that the young doctor, satisfied with his new lodgings and the good fortune sent to him from heaven, would not escape from the *hôtel*, he descended to the splendid apartment which he occupied on the first floor.

The next day, Bussy, on awaking, found Rémy at his bedside. The young man had spent the night without being able to believe in his good luck, and wanted to see Bussy again to be sure he had not been dreaming.

"Well, how do you feel, Monsieur le Comte ?" he said.

"Perfectly well, my dear Æsculapius ; and you,—are you satisfied ?"

"So satisfied, generous protector, that I would not change places with King Henri III., though he must be far advanced on the road to heaven, after his yesterday's penance. But that is not the question ; I must see your wound."

"Look." And Bussy turned on his side for the young surgeon to remove the bandage. All was doing well, the wound was nearly closed. Bussy, quite happy, had spent a good night ; sleep and happiness had aided the doctor, who now had scarcely anything to do.

"Well," asked Bussy, "what do you say of that, Maître Ambroise Paré ?"

" I dare not tell you that you are nearly well, for fear you should send me back to the Rue Beautreillis, five hundred and two paces from the famous house."

" That we must find, eh, Rémy ? "

" I should think so."

" Now you talk, my friend," said Bussy.

" Ah," cried Rémy, with tears in his eyes, " you call me your friend, monseigneur."

" I call thus all whom I love. Does it displease you ? "

" On the contrary," cried the young man, trying to kiss Bussy's hand,—" on the contrary ; but I feared I had not heard correctly. Oh, Monseigneur de Bussy, do you wish me to become mad with joy ? "

" No, my friend, I only wish you to love me a little ; you must henceforth look upon yourself as one of the household ; and permit me to-day, while you move your things, to go to the presentation of the *estortuaire*¹ by the new master of the hounds."

" Ah," said Rémy, " you already want to be imprudent ? "

" Oh, no ; on the contrary, I promise to be very reasonable."

" But you will have to go on horseback."

" Of course I must."

" Have you a horse that goes fast with an easy pace ? "

" I have four to choose from."

" Well, take for yourself the one you would give to the lady of the portrait you know."

" Ah, I should think I did know it ! Now, Rémy, you have found the way to my heart forever. I had great fears that you would prevent my going to this chase, or rather this imitation of one, for the ladies of the court and many of the city will be present. Now, Rémy, my dear Rémy, you understand that the lady of the portrait must naturally belong to the court or to the city. She is surely not a simple *bourgeoise*. That tapestry, those

¹ The *estortuaire* was the species of stick given by the master of the hounds to the king, and with which the latter pushed aside the branches as he galloped along.

beautiful enamels, that painted ceiling, that white and gold bed, so much luxury as well as good taste, show a woman of rank or at least a rich woman. If I were to meet her there ! ”

“ All is possible,” replied Rémy, with philosophy.

“ Except finding the house,” sighed Bussy.

“ And entering it if ever we find it,” added Rémy.

“ Oh, I never think of that until I am in,” said Bussy ; “ besides, I have found a method.”

“ What is it ? ”

“ To get another sword wound.”

“ Good ! ” said Rémy ; “ I have hopes that you will keep me.”

“ Be easy,” said Bussy. “ It seems to me that I have known you twenty years ; and upon my word as a gentleman, I could not do without you.”

The young doctor’s handsome face became radiant with joy.

“ Very well,” he said, “ it is decided. You go hunting to find the lady ; I go to the Rue Beautreillis to find the house.”

“ It would be curious if we returned having each made a discovery,” said Bussy ; and thereupon they parted, more like two friends than like master and servant.

A great chase had been commanded in the Bois de Vincennes, for the first appearance of M. Bryan de Monsoreau as master of the hounds, to which position he had been appointed a few weeks previously. The scene of the day before, and the severe penance of the king, who began his Lenten season on Shrove Tuesday, led many to believe that he would not be present at the chase. When the king had these religious attacks, he often spent several weeks without leaving the Louvre, when he did not enter a convent. But, to the great surprise of the whole court, it was announced at nine o’clock in the morning that the king had set out for Vincennes, and was hunting deer with his brother, Monseigneur d’Anjou and all the courtiers.

The meet was at the Point Saint-Louis. This was still

at this period the name of a cross-road where stood the famous oak-tree under which the martyr had been wont to sit and administer justice. Every one was therefore assembled there at nine o'clock, when the new officer, who was almost unknown at court, and therefore an object of general curiosity, appeared, mounted on a magnificent black horse. All eyes turned towards him.

He was a man of lofty stature, about thirty-five years of age ; his pock-marked face, covered with red spots that varied according to his emotions, arrested the glance, and forced a second look, which was not to the advantage of the individual.

Impressions are made at first sight ; the clear eye and loyal smile call for a sympathetic smile.

Clad in a dark-green cloth jacket braided with silver, wearing the silver shoulder-belt bearing the king's escutcheon ; on his head a cap with a long plume ; in his left hand a spear ; in his right hand the *estortuaire* destined for the king,—M. de Monsoreau might look like a terrible warrior, but he was surely not a handsome man.

“ Fie ! what an ugly face you have brought from your province, monseigneur,” said Bussy to the Duc d'Anjou. “ Are those the gentlemen your favor goes to seek in the country ? By the devil ! you could not find such a one in Paris, which surely abounds in ugly men ! It is rumored, but I would not believe it, that your Highness had stipulated that the king should give him this appointment.”

“ M. de Monsoreau has served me well,” laconically answered the duke, “ and I reward him.”

“ Well said, monseigneur ; it is a fine thing for princes to be grateful, but a rare one. However, if that be the question, I, too, have served you well, monseigneur, and I would better grace the position of master of the hounds than that tall fellow. He has a red beard ; I had not noticed it at first : it is an additional beauty.”

“ I had never heard that it was necessary to be an Apollo or an Antinous to fill a position at court,” replied the duke.

" You had never heard that, monseigneur ? " coolly replied Bussy. " I am surprised."

" I consult the heart and not the face," replied the prince ; " services rendered, not simply promised."

" Your Highness will say that I am very inquisitive," retorted Bussy ; " but I am searching in vain to find what service that Monsoreau can have rendered you."

" Ah, Bussy," said the duke, sharply, " you are very inquisitive,—too inquisitive even."

" Just like princes," said Bussy, with his usual boldness. " They always question, and you must answer on all things ; but if you ask a single question, you are too curious."

" That is true," said the Duc d'Anjou ; " but do you know what you can do to get information ? "

" No."

" Go and ask M. de Monsoreau himself."

" Ah, yes ; you are right, monseigneur. And as he is but a simple gentleman, I shall know what to do should he refuse to reply."

" What will you do ? "

" I shall tell him he is impertinent." Having said this, Bussy turned his back on the prince, and without reflecting any longer, before all his friends he approached M. de Monsoreau, hat in hand. The new master of the hounds, seated on his horse in the centre of the circle, coolly awaited the arrival of the king, who would rid him of the weight of all these glances.

When he saw Bussy come towards him with a smiling face and hat in hand, he unbent a little.

" Pardon me," said Bussy, " but I see you quite alone. Has your new dignity already given you as many enemies as you had friends a week before you were appointed master of the hounds ? "

" Upon my word, Monsieur le Comte," replied the lord of Monsoreau, " I would not swear to it ; but it is very probable. May I ask to what I am indebted for the honor you do me in invading my solitude ? "

" By my faith ! " bravely replied Bussy, " to the great admiration with which M. le Duc d'Anjou inspired me for you."

" How so ? "

" By relating to me the exploit for which you were appointed master of the hounds."

M. de Monsoreau grew so frightfully pale that the pock-marks in his face looked like so many black spots in his yellow skin ; at the same time he looked at Bussy in a manner that seemed to forbode a violent storm.

Bussy saw that he had followed the wrong tack, but he was not a man to retreat ; on the contrary, he was one of those who usually repair an indiscretion by an impertinence.

" You say, monsieur," replied the master of the hounds, " that monseigneur related to you my last exploit ? "

" Yes, monsieur, at full length," said Bussy, " and I confess it inspired me with a violent desire to hear it from your own lips."

M. de Monsoreau tightened his hold on the spear as though he would have liked to use it against Bussy.

" Really, monsieur," he said, " I was quite disposed to acknowledge your courtesy by granting your request, but, unfortunately, here comes the king ; with your permission I shall have to postpone that pleasure."

In fact, the king, mounted on a light bay genet, advanced rapidly from the donjon.

Bussy, glancing round, met the eyes of the Duc d'Anjou ; the prince was smiling in a wicked manner.

" Master and servant," thought Bussy, " both make an ugly grimace when they laugh. What must it be when they weep ! "

The king loved handsome faces ; he was therefore little pleased with M. de Monsoreau, whom he had already seen once, and whom he found as unprepossessing the second time as the first. However, he accepted, with rather good grace, the *estortuaire* which the latter handed him on bended knee. So soon as the king was armed, the

whipper-in announced that the hounds had the scent, and the chase began.

Bussy had stationed himself to one side, so that every one passed before him. He examined each face to ascertain if it was not the original of the portrait, but in vain. There were many pretty, charming, and beautiful women at this chase, where the master of the hounds made his first appearance, but the charming face which he sought was not there.

He was reduced to the conversation and company of his usual friends. Antraguet, always gay and talkative, was a great resource to him.

"We have a hideous master of the hounds," said he to Bussy. "What do you think of him?"

"I find him horrible. What a family we will have if all his connections resemble him! Show me his wife."

"The master of the hounds is unmarried, my dear," replied Antraguet.

"How do you know?"

"Through Madame de Veudron, who finds him very handsome, and would willingly accept him for a fourth husband as Lucretia Borgia took the Count d'Este. See how her bay horse follows his black one."

"Of what region is he lord?" asked Bussy.

"Of many."

"Situated?"

"In Anjou."

"Is he then rich?"

"So they say; but that is all. It seems he is not of very good family."

"And who, then, is the mistress of this rural magnate?"

"He has none; the worthy Monsoreau wishes to be unique among his fellows. But Monseigneur d'Anjou is calling you. Come quick."

"Ah, faith! Monseigneur d'Anjou will wait. That man excites my curiosity. I find him singular. I do not know why I have such ideas, the first time I see the man, but I have a feeling that we shall have some difficulty together. And then that name,—Monsoreau!"

" Mont de la Souris," replied Antraguet, " that is the etymology. My old abbé taught me that this morning,— Mons Soricis."

" Very good," said Bussy.

" Ah, wait a second ! " suddenly cried Antraguet.

" What ? "

" Livarot knows all about it."

" About what ? "

" The Mons Soricis. They are neighbors."

" Tell us at once. Eh, Livarot ! "

Livarot came near.

" Come quick, Livarot—the Monsoreau ? "

" Well ? " asked the young man.

" Tell us what you know about him."

" Willingly."

" Is it long ? "

" It is very short. In three words I can tell you what I know and think of him,—I fear him."

" Good ! You have told us what you think, now tell us what you know."

" Listen. I was returning one night—"

" That begins in a terrible manner," said Antraguet.

" Will you let me finish ? "

" Yes."

" It was about six months ago. I was returning one night from my uncle D'Entragues, through the woods of Méridor, when all at once I heard a frightful scream, and a white horse with an empty saddle passed near me and rushed towards the woods. I hastened onward, onward, and at the end of a long avenue, darkened by the approaching shades of night, I perceived a man on a black horse ; he was not riding, he was flying. The same smothered cry was again heard, and I saw before him on the saddle a woman, over whose mouth he held his hand. I had a gun in my hand ; you know that I am a pretty good shot. I aimed, and upon my word I would have killed him if the flame had not died out just as I pulled the trigger."

" Well, what next ? " asked Bussy.

“ Well, I asked a wood-cutter the name of the gentleman on the black horse who carried off women, and he told me it was M. de Monsoreau.”

“ Well,” said Antraguet, “ women have been carried off before,—eh, Bussy ? ”

“ Yes, but they are allowed to cry out at least,” he replied.

“ And the woman,—who was she ? ” asked Antraguet.

“ Ah, no one ever knew.”

“ Well,” said Bussy, “ he is positively a remarkable man, and he interests me.”

“ All the more,” said Livarot, “ that the dear gentleman has an atrocious reputation.”

“ Do you know anything else,—any facts ? ”

“ No, nothing. He has never even ostensibly done anything very bad ; moreover, he is even said to be rather good to his peasants. Nevertheless, he is greatly feared in the region which, until now, has had the good fortune to possess him. Besides, being like Nimrod a great hunter, not before God, but before the devil, the king will never have had such a master of the hounds. He will do much better than Saint-Luc, to whom the position was destined until M. d’Anjou’s influence disposed of it.”

“ Do you know that the Duc d’Anjou is still calling you ? ” asked Antraguet.

“ Let him call ; and you,—do you know what they say of Saint-Luc ? ”

“ No. Is he still prisoner of the king ? ” asked Livarot, laughing.

“ That must be,” said Antraguet, “ since he is not here.”

“ Not at all, my dear fellow. He left at one o’clock this morning to visit his wife’s estates.”

“ Exiled ? ”

“ It looks like it.”

“ Saint-Luc exiled ! Impossible ! ”

“ It is the Góspel—”

“ According to Saint-Luc.”

"No, according to the Maréchal de Brissac, who told me so this morning with his own lips."

"This is new and interesting, and will injure Monsoreau."

"I have it!" said Bussy.

"What have you?"

"I have found it."

"What have you found?"

"The service he has rendered to M. d'Anjou."

"Saint-Luc?"

"No; Monsoreau."

"Really?"

"Yes, or the devil fetch me! You shall see; come with me."

And Bussy, followed by Livarot and Antraguet, started off at a gallop to join the Duc d'Anjou, who, wearied with making him signs, was now walking a few yards further.

"Ah, monseigneur," he cried, as he joined the prince, "what a valuable man that M. de Monsoreau is!"

"Ah, really?"

"It is incredible."

"You have spoken to him?" asked the prince, mockingly.

"Certainly, and found him very clever."

"And you asked him what he had done for me?"

"Certainly, as it was my only object in speaking to him."

"And he answered you?" asked the duke, more smiling than before.

"He answered at once and most courteously."

"Well, what did he say, mighty swaggerer?" asked the prince.

"He politely confessed that he was your Highness's purveyor."

"Of game?"

"No; of women."

"What signifies this jest, Bussy?" asked the prince, frowning.

" It signifies, monseigneur, that, mounted on his big black horse, he carries off women for you ; and as they are doubtless ignorant of the honor in store for them, he puts his hand over their mouths to prevent their crying out."

The duke frowned, angrily clinched his fists, turned pale, and galloped away so furiously that Bussy and his companions remained behind.

" Ah, ah ! " said Antraguet, " it seems that the joke was a good one."

" All the better," said Livarot, " that every one does not seem to find it a joke."

" The devil ! " said Bussy, " the poor duke was hard hit."

A moment later M. d'Anjou's voice was heard calling :—

" Eh, Bussy ! where are you ? Come to me ! "

" Here I am, monseigneur," said Bussy, riding up. He found the duke laughing.

" Oh, it seems I said something funny, monseigneur."

" No, Bussy, I am not laughing at what you said."

" So much the worse ; I should have liked the honor of having amused a prince who rarely laughs."

" I am laughing, my poor Bussy, because you invent a tale to find out the truth."

" No, the devil take me ! monseigneur, I spoke the truth."

" Well, as we are alone, tell me your little story. Where did it happen ? "

" In the woods of Méridor, monseigneur."

This time the duke again grew pale, but said nothing.

" Positively," murmured Bussy, " the duke is mixed up in some way with that story of the man on the black horse and the lady on the white palfrey. Come, monseigneur," added Bussy aloud, and laughing because the duke had ceased to laugh, " if there is any way of serving you that will be agreeable to you, let us know and we shall do our best, should we even have to interfere with M. de Monsoreau."

" *Pardieu !* yes, Bussy, there is a way, and I shall explain it."

The duke then drew Bussy to one side.

“ Listen,” he said to him. “ I have met a charming woman by chance, at church. As some portion of her face, hidden beneath a veil, recalled that of a woman I had loved very deeply, I followed her, and found out where she lived. I have bribed her servant, and have a key to the house.”

“ Well, monseigneur, so far all seems to go well with you.”

“ Wait ; she is said to be a prude, though young, beautiful, and free.”

“ Ah, monseigneur, you are romancing ! ”

“ Listen ; you are brave, and pretend to love me.”

“ I have my days.”

“ For being brave ? ”

“ No, for loving you.”

“ Well, is this one of the days ? ”

“ To be useful to your Highness, I will make it one. Let us hear.”

“ Well, I want you to do for me what most people usually do only for themselves.”

“ Ah, ah ! ” said Bussy, “ if your Highness wishes me to make love to the lady to ascertain if she be really beautiful and a prude, that suits me.”

“ No, you must find out if any one else is making love to her.”

“ This is getting complicated, monseigneur. Explain yourself.”

“ You must conceal yourself, and discover who is the man who visits her.”

“ There is a man ? ”

“ I fear it.”

“ A lover, a husband ? ”

“ A jealous man, at all events.”

“ So much the better, monseigneur.”

“ How, so much the better ? ”

“ That doubles your chances.”

“ Thanks ; but in the mean time I should like to know who the man is.”

“ And you want me to find out ? ”

“ Yes ; and if you consent to render me this service— ”

“ You will appoint me master of the hounds at the next opportunity ? ”

“ Upon my word, Bussy, I should feel all the more grateful to you that I have never yet done anything for you.”

“ Ah, monseigneur, you have at last observed this fact ? ”

“ I have often said it to myself.”

“ Very softly, as princes generally say such things.”

“ Well ? ”

“ What, monseigneur ? ”

“ Do you consent ? ”

“ To watch the lady ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ Monseigneur, I admit that the employment hardly suits my taste, and that I should prefer another.”

“ You offered to do me a service, and you already retract your offer.”

“ Well, you want me to become a spy.”

“ Why no, I ask you to be my friend ; besides, do not believe that I am offering you a sinecure. There will be some good blows to exchange.”

Bussy shook his head.

“ Monseigneur, there are certain things that every man must do for himself, even though he were a prince.”

“ Then you refuse ? ”

“ Yes, monseigneur.”

The duke knit his brow.

“ I shall follow your advice and go myself, and if I am killed or wounded in the adventure, I shall say that I had begged my friend Bussy to accept the task of giving or receiving blows, and that for the first time in his life he was prudent.”

“ Monseigneur,” replied Bussy, “ you said to me the other night, ‘ Bussy, I hate all these favorites of the king, who insult us and laugh at us on every occasion. Go to this wedding of Saint-Luc’s, pick a quarrel with

them, and rid us of a few.' I went, monseigneur. They were five and I was alone ; I defied them all. They lay in wait for me, attacked me together, and killed my horse, yet I wounded two and beat a third one. To-day, you ask me to wrong a woman. Pardon me, monseigneur, but that is not the kind of service that can be demanded of a man of honor. Therefore, I refuse."

"Very well," said the duke, "I shall watch alone, or with D'Aurilly, as I did before."

"Pardon me!" said Bussy, suddenly enlightened.

"What?"

"Were you at your post, monseigneur, the other evening when you saw the king's favorites waiting for me?"

"Exactly."

"Does your fair unknown live near the Bastille?"

"She lives opposite Sainte-Catherine."

"Really?"

"A cut-throat neighborhood, as you ought to know."

"Has your Highness done any more watching since that night?"

"Yes, last night."

"And what did you see?"

"A man searching every corner of the place, to ascertain, no doubt, if he were being watched, and who, having probably perceived me, stood obstinately in front of that very door."

"Was that man alone, monseigneur?" inquired Bussy.

"Yes, for about half an hour."

"And at the end of the half-hour?"

"He was joined by another man who carried a lantern."

"Ah, ah!" said Bussy.

"Then the man in the cloak—" continued the prince.

"The first man wore a cloak?" interrupted Bussy.

"Yes. Then the man in the cloak and the man with the lantern began to talk together, and as they seemed little inclined to leave their post of observation, I came home."

"Disgusted after this second attempt?"

"Yes, I admit it. Therefore, before I venture into this house where I might be killed—"

"You would like to have one of your friends killed instead?"

"Or rather that one of my friends, not being the prince, not having the enemies that I have, and being, moreover, accustomed to these sorts of expeditions, should study the risk I might have to run, and report it to me."

"In your place, monseigneur," said Bussy, "I would abandon this woman."

"Not at all."

"Why?"

"She is too beautiful."

"You say yourself that you hardly saw her."

"I saw her enough to notice admirable golden hair."

"Ah!"

"Magnificent eyes."

"Ah, ah!"

"A complexion the like of which I had never seen before, and a superb figure."

"Ah, ah, ah!"

"You understand that I cannot easily renounce such a wonderful woman."

"Yes, monseigneur, I understand; therefore I feel for you."

He threw a side glance at Bussy.

"Upon my word!" said the latter.

"You jest."

"No, and the proof is that if you will give me your instructions, and show me the house, I shall watch this very night."

"You change your mind?"

"Eh, monseigneur, our holy father, Gregory XIII., is the only man who is infallible. Now tell me what I must do."

"You must conceal yourself some distance from the door I shall indicate, and if a man enter, follow him to find out who he is."

"Yes, but if on entering, he should close the door behind him?"

"I told you I had a key."

"Ah, true! Then there is but one thing to be feared. I might follow another man to another door."

"You cannot make a mistake; this door leads into a passage-way. At the end of the passage, to the left, you will find a staircase; mount twelve steps, and you will be in a corridor."

"How do you know that, monseigneur, if you have never entered the house?"

"Did I not tell you I had bribed a servant? She explained everything to me."

"*Tudieu!* how nice it is to be a prince; your work is all done for you. I, monseigneur, would have been obliged to find the house, explore the passage, count the steps, and examine the corridor; all that would have taken endless time, and I do not even know if I would have succeeded."

"Therefore, you consent?"

"How could I refuse your Highness? Only you must come and show me the door."

"It is unnecessary; as we return from the chase we shall make a *détour*, and pass through the Porte Saint-Antoine. I shall point it out to you."

"Very well, monseigneur; but what must be done to the man, if he come?"

"Only follow him until you learn who he is."

"That is a delicate matter; suppose the man's discretion should prompt him to stop in the middle of the way and cut short my inquiries?"

"You may behave as you wish under the circumstances."

"I have therefore your Highness's permission to act as I would for myself?"

"Entirely."

"I shall do so, monseigneur."

"Not a word to our young friends."

"No, on my honor."

" You will go alone on this expedition ? "

" Alone,—I swear it."

" Well, it is agreed. We shall return by way of the Bastille ; I will show you the door. Then you come with me ; I give you the key, and to-night— "

" I replace Monseigneur, and the matter is settled."

Bussy and the prince then rejoined the chase, conducted by M. de Monsoreau in a masterly fashion. The king was charmed with the precise manner in which this consummate hunter had arranged the halts and fixed the relays. After having been hunted for two hours, after having been followed in a radius of four or five leagues, after having been seen twenty times, the animal returned to be caught at its start. M. de Monsoreau was congratulated by the king and the Duc d'Anjou.

" Monseigneur, I am only too happy to deserve your compliments," he said, " since it is to you that I owe my position."

" But you know that in order to continue to deserve them," said the duke, " you must set out to-night for Fontainebleau. The king wishes to hunt there to-morrow and the days following, and one day will not be too much for you to study the country."

" I know, monseigneur," replied Monsoreau ; " my preparations are all made, and I shall depart to-night."

" Ah, M. de Monsoreau," said Bussy, " there is no more rest for you. You wished to be master of the hounds, and you are ; but you must calculate on having fifty nights' rest less than other men. Luckily you are not married, my dear Monsoreau ! "

Bussy laughed as he spoke these words. The duke cast a penetrating glance at the master of the hounds, then turning his head away he went to compliment the king on the improvement in his health.

As to Monsoreau, after Bussy's jest his face had assumed that livid hue which gave him such a sinister aspect.

CHAPTER XII.

HOW BUSSY FOUND BOTH THE ORIGINAL AND THE PORTRAIT.

THE chase was over at about four o'clock in the afternoon ; and at five o'clock, as though the king had guessed the Duc d'Anjou's secret wish, the whole court entered Paris through the Porte Saint-Antoine.

M. de Monsoreau, under pretext of setting out at once, had taken leave of the princes and departed in the direction of Fromenteau.

In passing in front of the Bastille, the king called the attention of his friends to the dark and gloomy aspect of the fortress. This was a gentle way of reminding them what would be their fate if they ceased to be his friends and became his enemies. Many of them understood, and were doubly deferential towards his Majesty.

In the mean while M. d'Anjou whispered to Bussy, who rode beside him : " Look, Bussy, look ! on the right, at that wooden house with a statue of the Madonna under the gable ; follow the same line and count four houses, including the one with the Madonna."

" Well ? " said Bussy.

" It is the fifth," said the duke ; " the one just opposite the Rue Sainte-Catherine."

" I see it, monseigneur. Look, at the sound of the trumpets announcing the king, all the windows are filled with spectators."

" Except those of the house I am showing you," said the duke ; " all its windows remain closed."

" But one corner of the curtain is raised," said Bussy, whose heart beat violently in his breast.

" Yet we can see nothing. Oh, the lady is well guarded, or guards herself well. At all events, you know the house ; at the *hôtel* I shall give you the key."

Bussy gazed through the narrow aperture ; but though he never moved his eyes, he could see nothing.

At the Hôtel d'Anjou the duke gave Bussy the key of the house, and told him again to keep a good watch. Bussy promised everything that the duke could ask, and went home.

“ Well ? ” he said to Rémy.

“ I shall ask you the same question, monseigneur.”

“ You have discovered nothing ? ”

“ The house is as impenetrable by day as by night. I am floating undecided between five or six adjoining houses.”

“ Then I think I have been more lucky than you, my dear Le Haudoin.”

“ How so, monseigneur ? Have you, too, been searching for it ? ”

“ No ; I only passed through the street.”

“ And you recognized the door ? ”

“ Providence, my dear friend, has secret ways and mysterious combinations.”

“ Then you are sure ? ”

“ I do not say I am sure, but I hope.”

“ And when shall I know if you have had the good fortune to find the object of your search ? ”

“ To-morrow morning.”

“ In the mean while do you need me ? ”

“ No, my dear Rémy.”

“ You do not wish me to follow you ? ”

“ Impossible.”

“ At least be prudent, monseigneur.”

“ Ah ! ” said Bussy, “ the recommendation is useless ; I am noted for my prudence.”

Bussy dined like a man who does not know when or where he will sup ; then, at eight o'clock, he chose his best sword, and in spite of the last law made by the king, he put a pair of pistols in his belt, and was carried in his litter to the corner of the Rue Saint-Paul. From that point he recognized the house with the Madonna, counted the four adjoining houses, and, satisfied that the fifth one was the one designated, he went, wrapped in a dark cloak, to a corner of the Rue Sainte-Catherine, determined

to wait for two hours, and if at the end of two hours no one came, to act for himself.

Saint-Paul's clock struck nine as Bussy entered his hiding-place. He had been there about ten minutes when he saw two cavaliers coming through the Porte de la Bastille. They stopped near the Hôtel des Tournelles. One of them dismounted, threw the reins to the second, who was probably a servant, and after seeing him return by the same way they had come, and disappear with the two horses into the darkness, he advanced towards the house that Bussy was watching.

When he was within a few steps of the house, he described a large circle, glancing round to see that no one observed him. Having apparently satisfied himself on that point, he approached the door and disappeared. Bussy heard the noise of the door as it closed behind him. He waited an instant, lest the mysterious personage might be looking through the wicket; then, a few minutes having elapsed, he crossed the street, opened the door, and, taught by experience, closed it noiselessly behind him.

He then turned round. The wicket was on a level with his eye, and it was probably through that wicket that he had seen Quélus. That was not all, and Bussy had not come so far to stop there. He felt his way along the passage, at the end of which, to the left, he found the staircase.

There, he stopped for two reasons: first, he felt his knees give way under the emotion, then he heard a voice saying,—

“Gertrude, tell your mistress that I am here, and wish to enter.”

This request was made in too imperative a tone to admit of a refusal, and a moment later, Bussy heard the maid reply,—

“Go into the drawing-room, monsieur, and Madame will join you there.”

Then he heard the sound of another door being shut. Bussy now thought of the twelve steps counted by Rémy;

he counted twelve steps, and found himself on a landing.

He remembered the corridor and the three doors, held his breath, and took a few steps, holding out his hands before him. He felt a first door, the one through which the unknown had passed ; he went in, found a second one, felt a second key, and trembling from head to foot, turned the key in the lock and pushed the door.

The room in which Bussy now found himself was in utter darkness, save one corner, which received through a side door some portion of the light from the drawing-room. This light shone on a window hung with tapestry curtains, the sight of which sent another delicious thrill through the young man's heart. He glanced at the part of the ceiling that was also lit up, and recognized the painted ceiling he had already observed ; he reached out his hand and felt the carved bedstead.

There was no more doubt ; he found himself in the room in which he had waked up after being wounded. A very different thrill went through Bussy's veins as he touched that bed and inhaled that delicious fragrance emanating from all that belongs to a young and beautiful woman. Bussy hid behind the bed-curtains to listen.

He heard in the next room the impatient tread of the unknown, who stopped from time to time and muttered between his teeth,—

“ Well ! will she come ? ”

After one of these exclamations a door opened into the drawing-room ; the door seemed parallel to the one already ajar. A small foot stepped over the carpet, the rustling of a silk skirt reached Bussy's ears, and he heard a woman's voice, expressive at once of fear and disdain, saying,—

“ Here I am, monsieur. What do you want now ? ”

“ Oh, oh ! ” thought Bussy, pulling the curtain over him, “ if that man be the lover, I congratulate the husband.”

“ Madame,” said the man who was thus coldly received, “ I have the honor of telling you that, forced to set off

to-morrow morning for Fontainebleau, I come to pass the night with you."

" Do you bring news from my father ? " asked the same woman's voice.

" Madame, listen to me."

" Monsieur, you know what we agreed yesterday, when I consented to become your wife,—that before all things, I would either go to my father or he would come to Paris."

" Madame, so soon as I return from Fontainebleau, we shall depart, I pledge you my word ; but in the mean time—"

" Oh, monsieur, do not close this door ; it is useless. I will not pass one night, not a single night, under the same roof with you, until I am reassured about my father."

And the woman who spoke so firmly, put to her lips a small silver whistle, which gave forth a long shrill sound. This was the manner in which servants were called at this period when bells were unknown.

At the same moment the door through which Bussy had entered was again opened, and the maid appeared ; she was a tall, strong-looking girl, who seemed to expect this call from her mistress and hastened to answer it. She passed into the drawing-room, and opened the door to do so. A flood of light inundated the room in which stood Bussy, and between the two windows he recognized the portrait.

" Gertrude," said the lady, " do not go to bed, and remain within call."

The maid without replying withdrew the same way she had come, leaving the drawing-room door wide open ; consequently the marvellous portrait remained visible. Bussy had no more doubts. This portrait was really the one he had seen.

He crept softly along, to place his eye in the opening left between the door and the wall by the thickness of the hinges. Although he moved carefully, just as his eye looked through the opening the floor creaked beneath his footsteps.

At the noise, the lady turned ; she was the original of the portrait, the fairy of his dream. The man had heard nothing, but seeing her turn, he turned also. It was M. de Monsoreau.

"Ah," said Bussy, "the white palfrey, the woman carried away. I shall doubtless hear some terrible story."

He wiped his brow, covered with perspiration.

Bussy, we have said, could see them both. The lady was standing, pale and scornful ; he seated, not pale but livid, nervously agitating his foot, and biting his fingers.

"Madame," finally said M. de Monsoreau, "do not hope to continue any longer this part of a persecuted woman. You are in Paris, in my house ; moreover, you are now Comtesse de Monsoreau,—that is to say, my wife !"

"If I am your wife, why do you refuse to take me to my father ? Why do you continue to hide me from every one ?"

"You forget the Duc d'Anjou, madame."

"You assured me that, once your wife, I should have nothing more to fear from him."

"That is to say—!"

"You promised me that."

"Nevertheless, madame, I must take a few precautions."

"Well, monsieur, take these precautions, and return to see me after they are taken."

"Diane," said the count, whose anger was visibly rising,—"Diane, do not make a jest of the sacred marriage tie. I am giving you this piece of advice."

"Monsieur, when I can trust the husband, I shall respect the tie that binds us."

"Yet, I thought that by my conduct I had deserved your confidence."

"Monsieur, I think that in this whole affair you were not guided by my interest alone, or if so, chance singularly aided you."

"Oh, this is too much !" cried the count. "I am in-

my house, you are my wife, and though hell itself come to aid you, this very night you shall be mine."

Bussy put his hand to his sword, and took a step forward, but Diane did not give him time to appear.

"Look!" she cried, drawing a dagger from her belt, "this is my answer;" and bounding into the room where Bussy was, she closed the door, and drew the double bolt, while Monsoreau exhausted himself in threats, and struck the door with his fist.

"If you break even a splinter of this door," said Diane, "you know me, and you will find me dead on the threshold."

"And be assured, madame, that you will be avenged," said Bussy, folding Diane in his arms.

Diane was on the point of screaming; but she understood that the only danger that threatened her came from her husband. She remained on the defensive, trembling, but silent and motionless. M. de Monsoreau stamped his foot in a rage; then, doubtless convinced that Diane would carry her threat into execution, he went out of the room, slamming the door behind him, after which his retreating footsteps were heard in the corridor, then on the stairs.

"But you, monsieur," said Diane, disengaging herself from Bussy's arms,—"who are you, and why are you here?"

"Madame," said Bussy, opening the door, and kneeling before Diane, "I am the man whose life you saved. How could you believe that I entered your house with any evil intentions, or that I had any designs against your honor?"

As the light streamed in on the young man's noble countenance, Diane recognized him.

"Oh, you here, monsieur!" she cried, clasping her hands. "You were there, you heard everything?"

"Alas! yes, madame."

"But who are you? What is your name?"

"Madame, I am Louis de Clermont, Comte de Bussy."

"Bussy! You are the brave Bussy?" joyfully cried Diane, without suspecting the happiness which would

flood the young man's heart as he heard her. "Ah, Gertrude," she continued, speaking to her maid, who had entered hastily on hearing her mistress talking with some one,—"Gertrude, I have nothing more to fear from this moment; I place my honor in the hands of the noblest and most loyal gentleman of France." Then holding out her hand to Bussy: "Rise, monsieur," she said. "I know who you are; you must know who I am."

CHAPTER XIII.

DIANE DE MÉRIDOR.

Bussy rose, quite bewildered at his own happiness, and followed Diane into the drawing-room which M. de Monsoreau had just left.

He looked at Diane with astonishment and admiration. He dared not hope that the woman he sought would bear comparison with the woman of his dream, and now the reality surpassed all that he had taken for a caprice of his imagination.

Diane was eighteen or nineteen,—that is, at that period of youth and beauty which gives the purest coloring to the flower, the most velvety aspect to the fruit. There was no mistaking Bussy's expression. Diane felt herself admired, and had not the strength to interrupt his ecstasy. At last she understood that she must break this too expressive silence.

"Monsieur," she said, "you have answered one of my questions, but not the other. I asked who you were, and you have told me; but I also asked how you came here, and you have not yet replied."

"Madame," said Bussy, "chance led me to overhear a few words of your conversation with M. de Monsoreau, and I think the cause of my presence here will come out of the history of your life, which you promised to relate to me. Did you not tell me I would soon know who you were?"

"Oh, I will tell you all, monsieur," answered Diane; "your name has been sufficient to inspire me with confidence, for I have often heard it as that of a man of courage whose loyalty and honor could be trusted."

Bussy bowed.

"From the little you have heard," continued Diane, "you must have understood that I am the daughter of the Baron de Méridor,—that is to say, the only heiress to one of the oldest and noblest names of Anjou."

"There was," said Bussy, "a Baron de Méridor who, although he could have saved his liberty at Pavia, gave up his sword to the Spaniards when he heard that the king was a prisoner. He begged for permission to accompany Francis to Madrid, shared his captivity, and only returned to France to negotiate the monarch's ransom."

"That was my father, monsieur; and if ever you enter the great hall of the Château de Méridor, you will see the portrait of Francis I., painted by Leonardo da Vinci, and given to my father in memory of this devotion."

"Ah," said Bussy, "in those days princes still knew how to reward their followers."

"On his return from Spain, my father married. His first two children, sons, died. This was a great sorrow to the Baron de Méridor, who lost all hopes of living again in an heir. The king died soon after, and my father's grief changed into despair. He left the court a few years later, and retired with his wife to the Château de Méridor. It was there that I was born, almost by miracle, ten years after the death of my brothers. Then all the love of the baron was concentrated on this child of his old age. His affection for me was more than tenderness; it was idolatry. Three years after my birth, my mother died. This surely was a new sorrow for my father; but I, too young to know what I had lost, did not cease to smile, and my smiles helped to console him."

"I grew up and developed under his eyes. As I was everything to him, my poor father was also everything

to me. I reached my sixteenth year without dreaming of any world outside of my lambs, my peacocks, my swans, and my doves ; not thinking that this life must end, nor wishing it to end.

“ The Château de Méridor was surrounded by vast forests belonging to the Duc d’Anjou. They were filled with roes, stags, and deer, which no one thought of tormenting. All were more or less familiar with me ; some were even so accustomed to my voice that they came when I called them. One, a doe,—my favorite, my pet, Daphné ; poor Daphné !—would come and eat out of my hand.

“ One spring, I missed her for a month. I thought her dead, and wept for her as for a friend, when she reappeared one day with two little fawns. The little ones were afraid of me at first, but seeing their mother caress me, they understood they had nothing to fear, and came and caressed me in turn.

“ About this time, it was reported that M. le Duc d’Anjou had sent a governor to the capital of the province. A few days later we learned that this governor had arrived, and was the Comte de Monsoreau. Why did that name strike me to the heart when I heard it uttered ? I can only account for this painful sensation by calling it a presentiment.

“ A week passed ; M. de Monsoreau was much talked about in the province, and in many different ways. One morning the woods were filled with the sound of the horn and the barking of dogs. I ran to the gate of the park and reached there just in time to see Daphné rush by like a flash, pursued by a pack of hounds ; her two fawns followed her. A moment later, a man mounted on a black horse which seemed to have wings dashed past the gate ; it was M. de Monsoreau.

“ I cried out, and implored pity for my poor pet ; but he did not hear the sound of my voice, or did not heed it carried away as he was by his ardor in the chase. Then without thinking of the anxiety I would cause my father if he perceived my absence, I ran in the direction of the

chase. I hoped to meet either the count himself, or some of his retinue, and implore them to cease that pursuit which tore my heart. I went on for half a league without knowing whither I was going. I had long since lost sight of doe, dogs, and hunters. I soon ceased even to hear the dogs, and sat down at the foot of a tree and began to weep. I had been there about a quarter of an hour, when in the distance I thought I distinguished the noise of the chase. I was not mistaken; the sound came nearer and nearer. I soon knew that they would pass within sight, so I rose and ran in the direction whence the sound came.

" I again saw my poor Daphné rush by, breathless. She had only one fawn; the other had given way to fatigue, and doubtless been torn to pieces by the dogs. She herself was growing visibly tired. The distance between her and the pack was less than when I saw her first, and she now bounded forward with sudden jumps. When she passed before me she troated mournfully.

" As before, I made fruitless efforts to be heard. M. le Monsoreau saw nothing beyond the animal he pursued, and passed, blowing his horn, even more swiftly than the first time. Behind him four or five followers urged the sounds onward with horn and voice. All this passed like a tempest, disappeared in the depths of the forest, and died away in the distance. I was in despair. I said to myself that had I been fifty steps nearer, on the edge of the glade, through which he had passed, he would have seen me, and listened to my prayer to spare the poor animal.

" This thought revived my courage. The chase could pass a third time within my reach. I followed a road bordered by beautiful trees, which I knew led to the château de Beaugé, situated about three leagues from Léridor, and belonging to the Duc d'Anjou. In a few minutes I came within sight of the castle, and only then did I remember that I had come three leagues on foot, that I was alone and far from home.

" I confess that a vague terror took possession of me,

and only then did I think of the imprudence and impropriety of my conduct. I walked along the edge of the lake, intending to ask the gardener—a good man who, when I went there with my father, had given me flowers,—to take me home, when all at once I heard again the sound of the chase. I remained motionless, listening. The noise came nearer; I forgot everything. Almost at the same instant the doe bounded out of the wood on the other side of the lake, but so closely pursued that she must be taken. She was alone; the second fawn had fallen in turn. The sight of the water seemed to give her new strength. She breathed the cool air and plunged into the water as though to come to me.

“At first she swam quickly, and seemed to have recovered her energy. I looked at her with tearful eyes and arms extended, almost as breathless as she. But her strength gradually failed her, while, on the contrary, the dogs seemed to grow more eager in their pursuit. Those nearest to her now seized her, and she could advance no farther. At that moment M. de Monsoreau appeared on the edge of the wood, ran to the lake, and jumped off his horse. Then I collected all my strength to cry for pity with clasped hands. I thought he had seen me; I cried again, louder than the first time. He heard me, and raised his head. I saw him run to a boat, which he untied, and in which he rapidly advanced towards the animal, now struggling in the midst of the whole pack. I did not doubt that, moved by my gestures, my voice, and my prayers, M. de Monsoreau was hastening to help. Assistance, when, having come within reach, I saw him draw his hunting-knife. A ray of sunshine falling on it made it flash, then the flash disappeared. I shrieked. The whole blade was plunged into the animal’s neck. The blood flowed out, reddening the water around. The doe uttered a doleful cry, beat the water with her feet, reared up, and then fell back dead.

“I uttered a cry almost as doleful as her own, and fainted on the bank. When I came to myself again, I was lying in a room of the Château de Beaugé, and m-

father, who had been sent for, sat weeping by my side. As I was suffering from nothing but over-excitement after the chase, the next day I was able to return to Méridor. However, I remained in my room for the next three or four days. On the fourth day, my father told me that during the whole time of my illness M. de Monsoreau, who had seen me as I was carried to the *château*, had come to inquire after my health. He was in despair when he heard that he had been the involuntary cause of the accident, and sent his excuses, saying that he would not be happy until he had his pardon from my own lips.

" It would have been ridiculous to refuse to see him ; therefore, in spite of my disinclination to do so, I granted his request. He came the next day. I had understood the absurdity of my conduct. The chase is a pleasure shared even by women ; I therefore excused my emotion on the ground of my affection for Daphné. Thereupon the count pretended to be in despair, and swore twenty times that had he known that I felt some interest in his victim, he would have spared her with pleasure. His protestations, however, failed to convince me, and the count withdrew without having effaced the first painful impression produced in my heart. When he took leave, he asked my father's permission to come again. He was born in Spain, and had been brought up in Madrid, and my father felt a great pleasure in talking of a country where he had so long resided. Besides, the count was of good lineage, deputy-governor of the province, and favorite, it was said, of M. d'Anjou. My father had no motive for refusing his request, which was granted.

" Alas ! from that moment ceased, if not my happiness, at least my tranquillity. I soon perceived the impression I had made on the count. At first he came once a week, then twice, and, finally, every day, and was full of attentions to my father, who liked him. I saw the pleasure the baron took in his conversation, which was certainly that of a clever man.

" One morning my father entered my room with a more

serious manner than usual, yet there was something joyous in his whole air.

“ ‘ My child,’ he said, ‘ you have always told me that you would be happy never to leave me ! ’

“ ‘ Oh, my father,’ cried I, ‘ you know that it is my dearest wish.’

“ ‘ Well, my child,’ he continued, stooping over to kiss me, ‘ the realization of this wish is in your own hands.’

“ I suspected what he was about to say to me, and grew so frightfully pale that he stopped before his lips had touched my brow.

“ ‘ Diane, my child ! ’ he cried. ‘ Oh, *mon Dieu* ! what is the matter ? ’

“ ‘ M. de Monsoreau, is it not ? ’ I stammered.

“ ‘ Well ? ’ he asked in astonishment.

“ ‘ Oh, never, father, if you have any pity for your daughter, never ! ’

“ ‘ Diane, my love,’ he said, ‘ it is not pity that I have for you, but idolatry, and you know it ; take a week to reflect, and if within a week—’

“ ‘ Oh, no, no ! ’ I cried, ‘ it is useless ; not a week, not twenty-four hours, not a minute ! ’ And I burst into tears.

“ My father adored me ; he had never seen me weep. With a few words he dried my tears, and took me in his arms. He had pledged his word that he would not speak again of that marriage. Indeed, a month elapsed during which M. de Monsoreau was neither heard of nor seen.

“ One morning my father and I received an invitation to attend a fête given by M. de Monsoreau in honor of the king’s brother, who had come to visit the province whose name he bore. This fête was to be given in the Hôtel de Ville of Angers. The letter was accompanied by a personal invitation from the prince, who wrote to my father that he remembered having seen him at the court of King Henri, and would have great pleasure in seeing him again.

“ My first impulse was to beg my father to refuse, and I would surely have insisted had the invitation been in M.

de Monsoreau's name alone ; but it was also in the name of the prince, and my father feared to offend his Highness if he declined.

" We went to this fête. M. de Monsoreau received us as if nothing had taken place between us. His behavior towards me was neither indifferent nor affected. He treated me exactly as he did all the other ladies. I was happy to see that I was in no way distinguished by him.

" It was not thus with the Duc d'Anjou. So soon as he perceived me, he fixed his gaze upon me, and never removed it. I felt ill at ease beneath the weight of that glance, and without telling my father why I wished to leave the ball, I urged him so strongly that we were among the first to retire. Three days later, M. de Monsoreau came to Méridor. I had seen him riding up the avenue to the *château*, and retired to my chamber.

" I was afraid my father would call me, but he did not. Half an hour later M. de Monsoreau left, and no one spoke of him ; but I thought my father more gloomy than usual after this visit of the deputy-governor.

" A few more days passed thus. I was returning from a walk, and was told by the servants that M. de Monsoreau was with my father. The baron had asked for me several times, and wondered where I could be. He had given orders that my return should be announced at once. I had hardly reached my room, in fact, when my father came to me.

" ' My child,' he said, ' a motive, which I cannot explain, forces me to separate myself from you for a few days. Do not question me, but know that the reason must be a serious one, since it determines me to be a week, a fortnight, a month perhaps, without seeing you.'

" ' And where am I to go, father ? ' I asked.

" ' To my sister's, at the Château de Lude, where you must remain concealed from all, and where we shall arrange for you to arrive at night.'

" ' Do you not accompany me ? '

" ' No, I must remain here to avert suspicion ; even the people of the house do not know where you are going.'

“ But who will conduct me ? ”

“ Two trusty men.”

“ Oh, *mon Dieu !* father.”

“ The baron embraced me.

“ It is necessary, my child,” he said.

“ I knew so well my father’s love for me that I insisted no further, and asked no explanation. It was agreed that Gertrude, my nurse’s daughter, should accompany me. My father left me, telling me to get ready.

“ That night, at eight o’clock (it was very dark and cold, for we were in mid-winter), my father came for me. I was prepared as he had told me. We descended noiselessly, crossed the garden, and he opened a little door leading into the forest. There we found a litter and two men. My father spoke to them a long time, giving them directions about me. I then placed myself in the litter with Gertrude beside me. The baron gave me a last embrace, and we started. I was ignorant of the nature of the danger that threatened me and forced me to leave Méridor. I questioned Gertrude, but she was as ignorant as I. I dared not speak to my guides, whom I did not know. We were going quietly along through by-roads, when at the end of two hours, just as I was falling asleep, thanks to the monotonous movement of the litter, I was awakened by Gertrude, who seized my arm while the litter stopped.

“ ‘ Oh, mademoiselle,’ said the poor girl, ‘ what can be the matter ? ’

“ I passed my head through the curtains. We were surrounded by five or six masked horsemen ; our men, who had tried to defend themselves, were disarmed and captured. I was too frightened to call for help, and besides, who would have heard our cries ? The one who appeared to be the chief of the masked men approached the litter and said,—

“ ‘ Reassure yourself, mademoiselle, no harm will be done to you ; but you must follow us.’

“ ‘ Where ? ’ I asked.

‘ ‘ To a place where, far from having anything to fear, you will be treated like a queen.’ ’

‘ ‘ This promise frightened me more than any threat.

‘ ‘ Oh, my father, my father ! ’ I murmured.

‘ ‘ Listen, mademoiselle,’ said Gertrude, ‘ I know the country. I am devoted to you, and I am strong. We shall be very unlucky if we do not succeed in escaping.’ ’

‘ ‘ This assurance given me by the poor girl was far from quieting me ; yet it is so comforting to feel one’s self supported that I recovered a little strength.

‘ ‘ Do with us what you wish, gentlemen,’ I answered ; we are only two poor women, incapable of defending ourselves ! ’

‘ ‘ One of the men dismounted, took the place of our conductor, and changed the direction of the litter.’ ’

Bussy, as we understand, listened to Diane’s tale with the deepest emotion. There are, in the first emotions of great love, sentiments of almost religious veneration for the loved one. The woman chosen by the heart is raised by that choice alone above all other women ; she is made greater, purer, more holy. Each of her gestures is a favor she grants you, each of her words a grace. If she looks at you, you rejoice ; if she smiles, your happiness is complete.

The young man had let his fair narrator tell him the story of her life without daring to stop her, without blinking of interrupting her. Every detail of this life, over which he felt himself called to watch, was full of interest for him ; and silent and breathless he listened to Diane, as though his very existence hung on every word.

Therefore, when the young woman, wearied no doubt by the double emotion which she felt, and in which the past was blended with the present, stopped for an instant, Bussy had not the strength to remain under the weight of his anxiety.

‘ ‘ Oh, continue, madame, continue ! ’ he said, clasping his hands.

It was impossible for Diane to remain in ignorance of

the interest she inspired ; everything in the voice, gesture, and expression of the young man was in harmony with the prayer conveyed in his words. Diane smiled sadly, and resumed her narrative :—

“ We journeyed for about three hours, then the litter stopped. I heard a gate creak on its hinges, and a few words were exchanged. The litter then continued, and we passed over something which I thought was a draw-bridge. I was not mistaken ; I looked out of the litter and saw we were in the courtyard of a castle.

“ What castle was it ? Neither Gertrude nor I could tell. We had often tried on the way to ascertain where we were, but we saw only an endless forest. It is true that the thought occurred to both of us that in order to deceive us as to the direction, we were being taken over a longer road.

“ The door of our litter was opened and the same man who had already spoken to us, invited us to alight. I obeyed in silence. Two men from the castle had come to meet us with torches. In accordance with the promise made me, our captivity was attended with every ceremony. We followed the men with the torches ; they conducted us to a richly ornamented bedroom which seemed to have been decorated in the style of the most brilliant epoch of the reign of Francis I. A sumptuous collation was spread on a table.

“ ‘ You are at home, here, madame,’ said the man who had already spoken to me, ‘ and as you will need the services of a maid, your own will not leave you ; her room is next to yours.’ Gertrude and I exchanged a joyous glance. ‘ Every time you wish to call,’ continued the masked man, ‘ you have but to strike on the knocker of this door and some one will be constantly in the ante-chamber to wait upon you.’

“ This apparent attention showed that we were closely watched. The man bowed and withdrew, and we heard him lock the door behind him. Gertrude and I were alone. We remained motionless for an instant, gazing at each other in the light of the two candelabra standing

on the table where the supper was spread. Gertrude wished to speak, but with my finger I made her a sign to be silent as some one was perhaps listening.

“ The door of the chamber which had been shown to us as Gertrude’s was open, and we both had the idea of visiting it. She took a light, and we went in on tip-toe. It was a large closet, evidently intended as a dressing-room to my chamber. It had a door parallel to the one of the next room through which we had entered ; this second door, like the first, was ornamented with a small brass knocker which fell on a head of the same metal. Heads and knockers both seemed the work of Benvenuto Cellini. The doors evidently opened into the same antechamber. Gertrude placed the light near the door and found it locked. We were prisoners.

“ When two persons are in the same position and share the same dangers their thoughts are wonderfully alike even though their rank be different, and they dispense very quickly with all unnecessary words and explanations. Gertrude approached me and said in a low tone :—

“ ‘ Did Mademoiselle observe that we mounted five steps from the courtyard ? ’

“ ‘ Yes,’ I replied.

“ ‘ We are therefore on the ground-floor.’

“ ‘ Without any doubt.’

“ ‘ So that—’ she added in a lower voice, pointing to the outer blinds.

“ ‘ So that if the windows are not barred—’

“ ‘ Yes, if Mademoiselle had the courage—’

“ ‘ Courage ! ’ I cried. ‘ Be assured that I shall not be wanting.’

“ It was now Gertrude who placed her finger on her lips.

“ ‘ Yes, yes, I understand,’ said I.

“ Gertrude made me a sign to remain where I was, and replaced the candelabrum on the bedroom table. I had already understood her intention, and had gone near the window and was looking for the springs. I found them, or rather, Gertrude, who had joined me, succeeded in

finding them. The blinds flew open. I uttered a cry of joy ; the window was not barred. But Gertrude had already noticed the cause of this pretended neglect on the part of our keepers. A large lake washed the foot of the wall, and we were more securely guarded by ten feet of water than we would have been by the bars on the windows.

“ But in glancing from the water to the shores, my eyes had recognized a familiar landscape. We were confined in the Château de Beaugé, where, as I said before, I had often come with my father, and where I had been carried the day of the death of my poor Daphné, about a month previous.

“ The Château de Beaugé belonged to the Duc d’Anjou. At this recollection a thought flashed through my mind, and I understood everything. I looked at the lake with a gloomy satisfaction ; it was a last resource against violence, a supreme refuge against dishonor.

“ We closed the blinds, and I threw myself dressed on the bed, while Gertrude slept in a chair at my side. Twenty times during the night I awoke, a prey to sudden terror, but nothing justified this terror except the situation in which I found myself. There were no signs of evil designs on me. On the contrary, all seemed asleep in the castle, and no noise, save the cry of the birds, broke the silence of the night.

“ Day dawned, but the light, though it freed the surroundings from any mysterious terrors, confirmed my fears that all escape was impossible unless we had assistance from without ; and how could this help reach us ?

“ At about nine o’clock, some one knocked at our door. I went into Gertrude’s room, telling her that the door could be opened. Those who knocked, and whom I could see through the crack of the door, were our attendants of the night before ; they came to take away the supper which we had not touched and to bring us our breakfast. Gertrude asked them a few questions, but they left the room without replying.

“ I then returned. All was made clear to me by the

fact of our being at the Château de Beaugé and the pretended respect with which I was treated. M. d'Anjou had seen me at the fête given by M. de Monsoreau ; M. d'Anjou had fallen in love with me. My father had been warned ; and wishing to save me from the pursuit of which I would no doubt be the object, he had sent me away from Méridor. But either through the treachery of a faithless servant, or by an unhappy chance, his precaution had become useless, and I had fallen into the hands of the man against whom he had vainly sought to protect me. I settled on this explanation, the only plausible one, and in reality the only true one.

“ Yielding to Gertrude's entreaties, I drank a cup of milk and ate some bread. Our whole morning was spent in planning means of escape ; yet we could see among the reeds, not a hundred yards from our windows, a bark with its oars. Had that boat been within reach, my strength, doubled by fear, together with Gertrude's, would have been sufficient to free us from captivity.

“ During the whole morning we were not troubled. Our dinner was brought to us, as our breakfast had been. I was faint. I therefore sat down to my dinner, served by Gertrude alone ; for so soon as our keepers had brought in the dishes, they left us. But all at once, as I broke my bread, I found a little note. I hastily opened it, and read this one line :—

“ A friend watches over you. To-morrow you shall have news of him, and of your father.

“ You can imagine my joy ; my heart was beating wildly. I showed the note to Gertrude. The rest of the day was spent in waiting and hoping.

“ The second night passed as quietly as the first ; then came the breakfast hour, so eagerly expected ; for I did not doubt that I would find a second note in my bread. I was not mistaken ; and the note was as follows :—

“ The person who had you carried here will arrive at the Château de Beaugé at ten o'clock to-night ; but at nine,

the friend who watches over you will be under your windows with a letter from your father commanding you to put faith in this friend,—a thing which you might not perhaps do without the letter.

“ Burn this paper.

“ I read and re-read this letter, then burned it, as I was instructed. The handwriting was unknown to me, and I confess I was ignorant from whom it might come. We lost ourselves in conjectures. A hundred times during the day we went to the window to see if we could perceive no one on the shores of the lake, but all was solitary. An hour after dinner there was a knock at our door. It was the first time that any one attempted to enter save to bring us our meals. However, as we had no way of locking ourselves in, we were obliged to allow them to enter.

“ It was the man who had spoken to us at the door of the litter and in the courtyard of the castle. I could not recognize his face, as he was masked when he spoke to us, but at the first words he uttered I knew his voice.

“ He handed me a letter.

“ ‘ From whom do you come, monsieur ? ’ I inquired.

“ ‘ If Mademoiselle will take the trouble to read, she will know,’ he replied.

“ ‘ But I do not wish to read this letter without knowing from whom it is.’

“ ‘ Mademoiselle is her own mistress, and may do as she pleases. I had orders to give her this letter. I lay it at her feet ; she may pick it up if she chooses.’

“ In fact, the man, who seemed to have the rank of a squire, laid the letter on a footstool at my feet, and went out.

“ ‘ What shall I do ? ’ I asked Gertrude.

“ ‘ If I might venture to offer advice to Mademoiselle, I would say, read the letter. It may perhaps announce some danger, a knowledge of which may aid us in escaping it.’

“ This advice was so reasonable that I abandoned my first resolve, and opened the letter.”

At this moment Diane interrupted her narrative, rose, went to a little Italian desk, and drew a letter from a silk portfolio. Bussy glanced at the address and read:—

“ To the beautiful, fair Diane de Méridor ; ” then, looking at Diane : “ This address,” he said, “ is written by the Duc d’Anjou.”

“ Ah,” she answered with a sigh, “ then he did not deceive me ! ”

As Bussy hesitated to open the letter, “ Read,” she said. “ Chance has brought before you all the secrets of my life, I shall therefore keep nothing from you.”

Bussy obeyed and read :—

An unhappy prince, whom your divine beauty has wounded to the heart, will come to-night at ten o’clock to offer you his apologies for his conduct towards you, his only excuse being the invincible love with which you have inspired him.

FRANÇOIS.

“ Then this letter is really from the duke ? ” asked Diane.

“ Alas ! yes,” replied Bussy ; “ it is his writing and his seal.”

Diane sighed. “ Can he be less guilty than I thought ? ” she murmured.

“ Who—the prince ? ” asked Bussy.

“ No, he—M. de Monsoreau.”

It was now Bussy’s turn to sigh.

“ Continue, madame,” he said, “ and we shall judge the prince and the count.”

“ This letter, which I had then no thought of not believing genuine, since it coincided so well with my own fears, indicated, as Gertrude had foreseen, the danger to which I was exposed, and rendered all the more precious to me the intervention of that unknown friend who offered me his help in my father’s name. I now only hoped in him.

“ Our investigations began again. Gertrude and I

gazed through the window-panes, and did not lose sight of the lake and of that portion of the forest which was opposite our windows. As far as the eye could reach, we saw nothing that could give us hope. Night came on ; but we were in the month of January, and at that season the days are short. We had still four or five hours to wait before the appointed time, to which we anxiously looked forward.

“ It was a beautiful frosty night ; and had it not been for the cold, we might have imagined it late spring or late autumn. The heavens were brilliant with myriads of stars, and in one corner the crescent-shaped moon shed its silvery light over the landscape. We opened the window of Gertrude’s room, which would no doubt be less carefully watched than mine.

“ At about seven o’clock a light mist rose from the pond ; but like a veil of transparent gauze, this mist did not prevent us from seeing, or rather, our eyes, accustomed to the darkness, succeeded in piercing this vapor. As we had no way of measuring time, we could not tell how long we had waited, when we suddenly seemed to see figures moving on the edge of the wood. These shadows appeared to approach with great precaution, going towards the trees, whose friendly shelter made the darkness even blacker. We might have believed that these shadows were merely due to fancy, when we distinctly heard the neighing of a horse.

“ ‘ Our friends,’ murmured Gertrude.

“ ‘ Or the prince,’ I replied.

“ ‘ Oh, the prince would not hide,’ she said.

“ This simple reflection drove away my suspicions, and reassured me. We were doubly attentive. A man now advanced alone ; I thought he left another group of men that had remained sheltered under a clump of trees. This man walked straight to the boat, detached it from its stake, entered it, and the boat glided over the water, moving noiselessly towards us. As it approached, my eyes made violent efforts to pierce the darkness, and I thought I recognized, first the tall form, then the gloomy

and strongly marked features of M. de Monsoreau. When he came within ten paces of the window, I no longer had any doubts. I now feared the help almost as much as the danger.

"I remained silent and motionless, having drawn back into a corner of the window where he could not see me. Having reached the foot of the wall, he fastened his boat to a ring, and I saw his head appear on a level with the window. I could not repress a cry.

"Ah, pardon me," said M. de Monsoreau. "I thought you expected me."

"I expected some one, monsieur, but I did not know it was you."

"A bitter smile passed over his face, 'Who else, except her father, watches over Diane de Méridor's honor?'

"You told me, monsieur, in the letter you wrote me, that you came in my father's name."

"Yes, mademoiselle; and as I knew you would have doubts, I have brought you a note from the baron,' and he gave me a paper.

"We had lit neither torches nor tapers, feeling more at liberty in the darkness to act as we would think fit under the circumstances. I went from Gertrude's room into my own, and kneeling before the fire, by the light of the flame I read :—

"MY DEAR DIANE,—M. le Comte de Monsoreau alone can save you from your perilous situation, and the peril is great. Have faith in him as in the best friend that Providence could send you. He will tell you later what I wish, from the bottom of my heart, you would do to acquit the debt we shall contract towards him.

Your father, who begs you to believe him, and to have pity on him, and on yourself,

BARON DE MÉRIDOR.

"I knew nothing positive against M. de Monsoreau. The aversion he inspired in me was instinctive rather

than reasoned. I could only reproach him with the death of a doe,—a very light crime for a hunter. I therefore went to him.

“ ‘ Well ? ’ he asked.

“ ‘ Monsieur, I have read my father’s letter. He tells me you will take me hence, but does not say whither.’

“ ‘ I shall take you where the baron is waiting for you, mademoiselle.’

“ ‘ Where ? ’

“ ‘ At the Château de Méridor.’

“ ‘ Then I shall see my father ? ’

“ ‘ In two hours.’

“ ‘ Ah, monsieur, if you speak truly— ’ I stopped : the count was visibly waiting for the end of my sentence. ‘ Count on my gratitude,’ I added in a weak and trembling voice, for I knew what he might expect from my gratitude which I had not the strength to express to him.

“ ‘ Mademoiselle,’ said the count, ‘ are you ready to follow me ? ’

“ I looked anxiously at Gertrude, and could easily see that the count’s sinister face was not more reassuring to her than it was to me.

“ ‘ Reflect that each minute that passes is most precious for you,’ he said. ‘ I am almost half an hour behind time. It will soon be ten o’clock, and have you not been notified that the prince would be at ten o’clock at the Château de Beaugé ? ’

“ ‘ Alas ! yes,’ I answered.

“ ‘ After the prince’s arrival, I can do nothing more for you than hopelessly risk my life, which I now risk with the certain knowledge that I can save you.’

“ ‘ Why did not my father come ? ’

“ ‘ Do you think your father is not watched ? Do you think his slightest movement is not known ? ’

“ ‘ But you ? ’ I asked.

“ ‘ With me, it is very different. I am the prince’s friend and confidant.’

“ ‘ But, monsieur,’ I cried, ‘ if you are the prince’s friend and confidant, then— ’

“ ‘ Then I betray him for you. Yes, I do. Therefore I told you just now that I was risking my life to save your honor.’

“ There was such a ring of conviction in the count’s words, which seemed to accord so visibly with the truth, that although I was still loath to trust myself to him, I found no words to express this feeling.

“ ‘ I am waiting,’ said he.

“ I looked at Gertrude, who was as undecided as I was.

“ ‘ See ! ’ said M. de Monsoreau ; ‘ if you still doubt, look there.’

“ On the other side of the lake, coming from an opposite direction, was a troop of horsemen advancing towards the *château*.

“ ‘ Who are those men ? ’ I asked.

“ ‘ The Duc d’Anjou, and his suite,’ replied the count.

“ ‘ Mademoiselle, mademoiselle,’ said Gertrude. ‘ There is no time to lose.’

“ ‘ We have already lost too much,’ said the count.

‘ In the name of Heaven, make up your mind ! ’

“ I fell upon a chair, and my heart misgave me.

“ ‘ Oh ! *mon Dieu ! mon Dieu !* what shall I do ? ’ I murmured.

“ ‘ Listen,’ said the count, ‘ listen ; they are knocking at the door.’

“ In fact, we could hear the knocker raised by the two men we had seen separate from the group and come forward.

“ ‘ In five minutes,’ said the count, ‘ it will be too late.’

“ I tried to rise, but my limbs failed me.

“ ‘ Help me, Gertrude,’ I stammered, ‘ help me ! ’

“ ‘ Mademoiselle,’ said the poor girl, ‘ do you hear the gate open ? Do you hear the horses in the yard ? ’

“ ‘ Yes ! yes ! ’ I answered with an effort. ‘ But I have no strength.’

“ ‘ Oh, is that it ? ’ she said ; and taking me in her arms as she would a baby, she placed me in those of the count ; but when I felt that man’s touch, I shuddered so violently that I nearly slipped from him and fell into the

lake. He pressed me to his bosom and put me in the boat. Gertrude had followed me and come down without assistance. Then I noticed that my veil had come off, and was floating on the water. I thought we would be tracked by it.

“ ‘ My veil ! my veil ! ’ I said to the count, ‘ catch my veil ! ’

“ The count glanced at the object I was pointing out to him.

“ ‘ No,’ he said, ‘ it is better so,’ and seizing the oars, he rowed with such strength that with a few strokes he had reached the bank. At this moment we saw the windows of my room lighted up ; the servants had just brought in lights.

“ ‘ Have I deceived you ? ’ said M. de Monsoreau, ‘ and was it time ? ’

“ ‘ Oh, yes, yes, monsieur,’ said I to him ; ‘ you are indeed my savior ! ’

“ However, we could see the lights move swiftly about from my room to Gertrude’s. We heard voices, then a man entered, and all the others moved aside. This man came up to the open window, looked out, saw the veil floating on the water and uttered a cry.

“ ‘ You see I was right to leave that veil,’ said the count. ‘ The prince will believe that to escape him you have thrown yourself into the lake ; and while he is searching for you, we will escape.’

“ Then, indeed, I trembled at the dark depths of that mind that could count in advance on such an expedient. At that moment we landed.”

CHAPTER XIV.

THE TREATY.

THERE was again a moment’s silence. Diane, almost as overcome by the memory as by the real event, felt her voice ready to fail her. Bussy listened to her with all the

aculties of his soul, and was vowing eternal hatred to all her enemies, whoever they might be. Finally, after smelling some salts that she drew from her pocket, she continued :

" Scarcely had we set foot on the shore when seven or eight men rushed to us. They were the count's people, and I thought I recognized among them the two servants who accompanied our litter when we were attacked by those who conducted us to the Château de Beaugé. A room held two horses ; one was the count's black steed, the other was a white palfrey for me. The count helped me to mount, and when I was settled, jumped on his own horse. Gertrude took her seat behind one of the men, and so soon as all was ready, we set off at full gallop. I noticed that the count held the bridle of my palfrey, and made him observe that I was a sufficiently good horse-woman to dispense with this precaution ; but he replied that my horse might shy and become separated from him.

" We had galloped about ten minutes when I heard Gertrude's voice calling me. I turned round, and saw that our troop was divided. Four of the men had taken by-path, and were leading her into the forest, while I. de Monsoreau and the other four accompanied me along the high-road.

" ' Gertrude ! ' I cried. ' Monsieur, why does not Gertrude come with us ? '

" ' It is an indispensable precaution,' said the count. If we are pursued we must leave two tracks. In two directions, chance travellers must be able to say they have seen a woman carried off by men. There is then a possibility that M. d'Anjou may take the wrong track, and follow the maid instead of you.'

" Although plausible, the answer did not satisfy me ; but what could I say or do ? I sighed and waited. Besides, the road which the count was following was really the one that led to Méridor. At the rate at which we were going we would have reached the *château* in fifteen minutes, when all at once, having come to a cross-road in the forest which I well knew, the count, instead

of following the road that led to my father's, turned to the left and rode in an exactly opposite direction. I immediately cried out, and in spite of the rapid pace of my palfrey, I had already placed my hand on the pomme of the saddle to jump down, when the count, who no doubt watched all my movements, leaned towards me, threw his arm around me, lifted me from my horse, and placed me on the saddle before him. The palfrey, feeling relieved of its burden, fled neighing through the forest. The count acted with such rapidity that before I had time to utter a cry, M. de Monsoreau put his hand over my mouth.

“ ‘ Mademoiselle,’ he said to me, ‘ I swear to you on my honor that I am only following your father’s orders, as I shall prove to you at our first halt. If that proof does not suffice, and if you are still doubtful, on my honor you will be free.’

“ ‘ But, monsieur, you told me you were conducting me to my father ! ’ cried I, pushing away his hand, and throwing my head backwards.

“ ‘ Yes, I told you so because I saw that you hesitated to follow me, and another moment’s hesitation would have ruined us all, as you may have seen. Now come,’ said the count, stopping, ‘ do you wish to kill the baron ? Do you wish to go straight to your own dishonor ? Say but one word, and I shall conduct you to Méridor.’

“ ‘ You spoke of a proof that you were acting in my father’s name.’

“ ‘ Here is this proof,’ said the count. ‘ Take that letter and read it at our first stopping-place. If, after having read it, you still wish to return to the *château*, repeat it, on my honor, you will be free to do so. But if you have some respect for the baron’s orders, you will not return, I am very sure.’

“ ‘ Then come, monsieur ; let us hasten to reach our first stopping-place, as I long to know if you are speaking the truth.’

“ ‘ Remember that you follow me freely.’

“ ‘ Yes, but with the freedom left to a young girl who

sees her father's death and her own dishonor on the one hand, and on the other, the obligation to trust to the word of a man she scarcely knows. However, I follow you freely, monsieur, as you will be able to see if you will kindly give me a horse.'

" The count made a sign to one of his men to dismount. I also jumped down, and in another minute I was in the saddle near the count.

" ' The palfrey cannot be very far off,' he said to the man. ' Seek her in the forest ; call her ; you know she obeys a whistle or a call like a dog. You will join us at La Châtre.'

" I shuddered in spite of myself. La Châtre was ten leagues from Méridor, on the road to Paris.

" ' Monsieur,' said I, ' I accompany you, but at La Châtre we shall make our conditions.'

" ' Or rather, mademoiselle, at La Châtre you will give me your orders,' replied the count.

" This pretended obedience did not reassure me. However, as I had no choice, and saw no other means to escape the Duc d'Anjou, I silently followed on. At day-break, we reached La Châtre ; but instead of entering the village, just before coming to the first gardens, we went across country towards a lonely house. I stopped my horse.

" ' Where are we going ? ' I asked.

" ' Listen, mademoiselle,' said the count. ' I have already noticed that you have a very sound judgment, to which I appeal. In flying from a prince, next in power to the king, can we stop in an ordinary hostelry, in the midst of a village where the first peasant who sees us will denounce us ? We may bribe one man, but we cannot bribe a whole village.'

" All the count's answers always struck me by their logic, or, at least, their plausibility.

" ' Very well,' said I, ' go on.'

" We resumed our way. We were expected, for, unperceived by me, one of the men of our escort had ridden on in advance. A good fire was burning in a rather clean room, and a bed was prepared.

“ ‘ Here is your room, mademoiselle,’ said the count. ‘ I shall await your orders.’

“ He bowed, retired, and left me alone. The first thing I did was to go near the lamp, draw my father’s letter from my bosom. Here it is, Monsieur de Bussy. I make you my judge. Read.”

Bussy took the letter and read:—

“ MY BELOVED DIANE,—As I have no doubt that you yielded to my prayer, and followed M. de Monsoreau, he must have told you that you had had the misfortune to attract the attention of the Duc d’Anjou, who had you carried off by force, and taken to the Château de Beaugé. You may judge by this violence of what the duke is capable, and the shame that threatens you. Well, there is one way of avoiding the dishonor which I would not survive; one means of escape,—that is, marrying our noble friend. Once you are the Comtesse de Monsoreau, the count will be defending his wife, and he has sworn to care for you in every way. I desire, therefore, my darling daughter, that this marriage should take place as soon as possible; and if you yield to my wishes, I send you my positive consent, together with my paternal benediction, and pray God that he may bestow upon you all the treasures of happiness he reserves for hearts like yours.

“ Your father, who does not order, but entreats,

“ BARON DE MÉRIDOR.”

“ Alas ! ” said Bussy, “ if this letter be really from your father, madame, it is only too clear.”

“ I do not doubt its being from him; nevertheless, I read it three times before coming to any decision. I finally called the count.

“ He entered at once, which showed that he had been standing at the door. I held the letter in my hand.

“ ‘ Well ! ’ he said to me, ‘ have you read it ? ’

“ ‘ Yes,’ I answered.

“ ‘ Do you still doubt my devotion and respect ? ’

“ ‘ If I had doubted, monsieur, this letter would have

imposed belief upon me. Now, suppose I am willing to yield to my father's wishes, what do you intend doing ?'

" ' I intend to take you to Paris, mademoiselle ; that is, after all, the easiest place to hide you.'

" ' And my father ?'

" ' As soon as there will no longer be danger of compromising you, you know that the baron will hasten to join you, wherever you may be.'

" ' Well, monsieur, I am ready to accept your protection, and the conditions you impose.'

" ' I impose nothing, mademoiselle,' answered the count ; ' I only offer you the means of escape.'

" ' Well, I correct myself, and I say with you, I am ready to accept the means of safety you offer me, on three conditions.'

" ' Speak, mademoiselle.'

" ' The first one is that Gertrude shall return to me.'

" ' She is here,' said the count.

" ' The second is that we shall travel separately as far as Paris.'

" ' I was about to propose this separation, to reassure you.'

" ' And the third is that our marriage, unless I myself acknowledge some urgent necessity for it, shall take place only in presence of my father.'

" ' It is my earnest desire, and I count on his benediction to call down that of Heaven upon our heads.'

" I remained astounded. I had expected to find in the count some opposition to this triple expression of my will, when, on the contrary, he was exactly of my opinion on all things.

" ' Now, mademoiselle,' said M. de Monsoreau, ' will you permit me to offer you some advice ?'

" ' I am listening, monsieur.'

" ' Travel only by night.'

" ' Agreed.'

" ' Let me choose the route and stopping-places ; all my precautions tend to a single object, and that is, aiding you to escape the Duc d'Anjou.'

“ ‘ If you love me as you say, monsieur, our interests are the same ; therefore, I have no objections to make.’

“ ‘ Lastly, in Paris, to accept the lodging I shall have prepared for you, however simple and out of the way it may be.’

“ ‘ I only hope to live in retirement, monsieur ; the more simple and out of the way the lodging may be, the more it will suit a fugitive.’

“ ‘ Then we shall agree on all points, mademoiselle ; and the better to conform with the plan you have traced, I need but present my most humble respects, send you your maid, and arrange for the rest of your journey.’

“ ‘ For my part, monsieur,’ I replied, ‘ I shall keep my word if you keep yours.’

“ ‘ This is all I ask,’ said the count ; ‘ and this promise assures me that I shall soon be the happiest of men.’

“ With these words he bowed and left the room ; five minutes later, Gertrude entered. This good girl’s joy was great ; she had believed herself forever separated from me. I told her all that had taken place. I needed someone who could enter into all my views, second all my desires, understand and obey me at a glance or a sign. M. de Monsoreau’s facility astonished me, and I feared some violation of the treaty concluded between us. As I finished, we heard the sound of a horse’s hoofs. I ran to the window ; it was M. de Monsoreau galloping off on the road by which we had come. Why did he go back instead of going forward ? This was something I could not understand. However, he had fulfilled the first article of the treaty in restoring Gertrude to me, he was fulfilling the second in going away ; there was nothing to be said. Besides, whatever direction he might take, his departure reassured me.

“ We spent the whole day in the little house, served by our hostess. Towards evening, the man who seemed the chief of the escort entered my room to take my orders. As the danger seemed to me greater so long as I remained near the Château de Beaugé, I answered that I was ready. Five minutes later, he returned to say that they awaited

ne. At the door I found my white mare. As M. de Monsoreau had thought, she had come at the first call. We travelled all night, and stopped at daybreak, as we had done before. I calculated that we must have gone about fifteen leagues. Besides, M. de Monsoreau had taken every precaution to guard me against fatigue or cold. The horse he had chosen for me had a very easy pace, and as I left the house a fur cloak had been thrown over my shoulders. This halt resembled the first one, and all our nocturnal journeys were alike,—always the same attentions and the same respect; everywhere the same care. We were evidently preceded by some one who prepared lodgings. Was it the count? I cannot say; in accomplishing this duty with the same regularity as the others, not once did I see him.

“ On the seventh day, from the top of a hill, I perceived a great cluster of houses. It was Paris. We halted to await the night; and when darkness had set in, we resumed our way. We soon passed under a gate, beyond which the first object that struck my gaze was an immense building, the high walls of which made me recognize it as a monastery. Then we crossed the river twice, took to the right, and ten minutes later we reached the Place de la Bastille. A man who seemed to be waiting for us came out of a door-way, and approaching the chief of the escort,—

“ ‘ It is here,’ he said.

“ The chief of our escort turned to me:—

“ ‘ You have heard, madame; we have arrived.’ And jumping off his horse, he offered me his hand to dismount as he always did. The door was open, and a light on the stairs lit up the passage.

“ ‘ Madame,’ said the man to me, ‘ you are at home. At this door the mission I received comes to an end; may I flatter myself that I have fulfilled it according to your wishes, and with all the respect enjoined upon us?’

“ ‘ Yes, monsieur,’ I said. ‘ I have only thanks to give you; offer them in my name to the good people who have

accompanied me. I would like to remunerate them in a better way, but I possess nothing.'

" Do not trouble yourself about that, madame," answered the one to whom I offered my excuses ; ' they are amply rewarded.'

" At these words the little troop galloped off, and disappeared in the Rue Saint-Antoine. Gertrude had closed the door at once, and we had watched them ride off, through the wicket. We went to the stairs, lighted by a lamp, which Gertrude took as she led the way. We went up and found ourselves in the corridor ; the three doors were open. We entered the middle one, and found ourselves in this drawing-room. It was all lighted as at this moment. I opened this door, and found a large dressing-room ; then the other, which was that of my bedroom, in which to my great surprise I saw my own portrait. I recognized the one that hung in my father's room at Méridor, and the count had doubtless begged it of the baron.

" I shuddered at this new proof that my father already regarded me as M. de Monsoreau's wife. We went through the house, which was deserted, but nothing was wanting. There was a fire burning in every chimney, and in the dining-room a supper was served. I threw a rapid glance on this table ; there was only one plate ; I was reassured.

" Well, mademoiselle," said Gertrude, ' you see the count keeps his promises to the end.'

" Alas ! yes," I answered with a sigh. ' I would have preferred to see him break some of his promises ; then I could have broken mine.'

" I took supper ; then we visited the house a second time, but found no one in it. It was ours, and we were alone. Gertrude slept in my room. The next day she went out to look about ; and only then did I know that we were at the end of the Rue Saint-Antoine, opposite the Hôtel des Tournelles, and that the fortress towering on my right was the Bastille. Nevertheless, all this information did not mean very much to me. I did not know

Paris, having never been there. The day went by without bringing anything new. That night, just as I sat down to supper, some one knocked at the door. Gertrude and I looked at each other. There was a second knock.

“‘ Go and see who is knocking,’ I said.

“‘ If it be the count?’ she said, seeing that I turned pale.

“‘ If it be the count,’ I answered with an effort, ‘ you must open to him. He has faithfully kept his promises, and he will see that, like him, I have but one word.’

“‘ A moment later Gertrude reappeared.

“‘ It is the count, madame,’ she said.

“‘ Let him come in,’ I replied.

“‘ Gertrude moved aside and made way for M. de Monsoreau, who appeared on the threshold.

“‘ Well, madame,’ he asked me, ‘ have I faithfully kept my part of the agreement?’

“‘ Yes, monsieur,’ I answered, ‘ and I thank you.’

“‘ You are, then, willing to receive me?’ he added, with a smile, the irony of which he vainly attempted to suppress.

“‘ Come in, monsieur.’

“‘ The count approached, and remained standing. I made him a sign to be seated.

“‘ Have you any news, monsieur?’ I asked him.

“‘ Of what and of whom, madame?’

“‘ Of my father and of Méridor, before all!’

“‘ I have not returned to the Château de Méridor, and I have not seen the baron.’

“‘ Then of Beaugé and of the Duc d’Anjou?’

“‘ This is different. I have been to Beaugé, and have spoken to the duke.’

“‘ How did you find him?’

“‘ Trying to doubt?’

“‘ To doubt what?’

“‘ Your death.’

“‘ But you confirmed it?’

“‘ I did my best.’

“‘ And where is the duke?’

“ ‘ He reached Paris last night.’

“ ‘ Why did he return so rapidly ? ’

“ ‘ Because no man willingly remains in a place where he thinks he has a woman’s death to reproach himself with.’

“ ‘ Have you seen him since his return to Paris ? ’

“ ‘ I have just left him.’

“ ‘ Has he spoken to you of me ? ’

“ ‘ I did not give him time.’

“ ‘ Of what did you speak ? ’

“ ‘ Of a promise he had made me, and which I urged him to fulfil.’

“ ‘ What is it ? ’

“ ‘ He promised to have me appointed master of the hounds as a reward for services I have rendered.’

“ ‘ Ah, yes ! ’ I said with a smile, thinking of my poor Daphné’s death. ‘ You are a terrible hunter, I remember, and as such you have claims to the place.’

“ ‘ It is not as a hunter that I shall obtain it, madame, but as a servant of the prince. I shall not have it because I may have claims, but because M. d’Anjou would not dare be ungrateful to me.’

“ Notwithstanding the respectful tone in which they were uttered, there was in all these answers something that frightened me,—the expression of a dark and implacable will. I remained silent for a moment.

“ ‘ Am I permitted to write to my father ? ’ I asked.

“ ‘ No doubt ; but remember that your letters may be intercepted.’

“ ‘ Am I forbidden to go out ? ’

“ ‘ Nothing is forbidden, madame ; I only beg you to observe that you may be followed.’

“ ‘ At least I must go and hear Mass on Sunday.’

“ ‘ It would be better for your safety that you should not go ; but if you wish to do so, I would advise you to go to Sainte-Catherine.’

“ ‘ Where is that church ? ’

“ ‘ Opposite your house, on the other side of the street.’

“ ‘ Thank you, monsieur.’

" There was another silence.

" ' When shall I see you again, monsieur ? '

" ' I await your permission to return.'

" ' Do you need it ? '

" ' No doubt. I am as yet a stranger to you.'

" ' Have you not a key to this house ? '

" ' Your husband alone has the right to have one.'

" ' Monsieur,' I said, more frightened by these singularly submissive answers than I would have been by absolute commands—' Monsieur, you will return when you please, or when you think you have something of importance to communicate.'

" ' Madame, I shall make use of your permission, but not abuse it,—and I give you the first proof by begging you to receive my respects.'

" The count rose with these words.

" ' You leave me ? ' said I, more and more surprised at this way of acting, which was so different from what I expected.

" ' Madame,' replied the count, ' I know that you do not love me, and I shall not abuse the situation in which you are placed by forcing you to receive my attentions. By being discreet at first, I hope you will gradually become accustomed to my presence, and in this manner the sacrifice will be less painful when the time will come for you to be my wife.'

" ' Monsieur,' said I, rising in turn, ' I acknowledge the delicacy with which you have acted, and, notwithstanding the sort of rudeness that accompanies all your words, I appreciate them. I will be equally frank with you. I had a prejudice against you which I hope time will cure.'

" ' Permit me, madame,' he said, ' to share this hope, and to look forward to that happy moment.' Then, bowing with all the respect I might have expected from my most humble servant, he made a sign to Gertrude, who had been present during this whole conversation, to light him to the door."

CHAPTER XV.

THE MARRIAGE.

" UPON my soul, he is a strange man," said Bussy.

" Oh, yes, very strange, is he not, monsieur ? He expressed his love for me with all the harshness of hatred. Gertrude, when she returned, found me sadder, and more frightened than ever. She tried to reassure me, but the poor girl was visibly as uneasy as myself. This icy respect, this ironical obedience, this repressed passion which vibrated in every tone of his voice, were more frightful to me than a firmly expressed will which I might have opposed.

" The next day was Sunday. As far back as I could remember, I had never failed to attend the divine office. I heard the bells of Sainte-Catherine's, which seemed to call me. I saw every one going to church, so I wrapped myself up in a thick veil, and, followed by Gertrude, I joined the throng of faithful Christians called by the bell. I looked for the darkest corner, and knelt near a wall. Gertrude placed herself like a sentinel between the people and me, but this time the precaution was useless. No one seemed to notice us.

" Two days later, the count returned, and announced that he had been appointed master of the hounds. M. d'Anjou's influence had obtained for him that position which had almost been promised to M. de Saint-Luc, one of the king's favorites. This was a triumph which he himself had scarcely expected."

" In fact," said Bussy, " we were all astonished."

" He came to announce the news, hoping that his new dignity might induce me to give my consent. However, he did not press me, he did not insist ; he hoped everything from my promise, and from events. As for me, I was beginning to hope that since the Duc d'Anjou believed me dead, and the danger no longer existed, I would cease to be bound to the count. Seven more days elapsed

without bringing anything new, save two visits from M. de Monsoreau. These visits, like the preceding ones, were cold and respectful; but I have already told you how singular and even threatening were this coldness and this respect.

"The following Sunday I went to church, as I had already done, and occupied the same place I had taken a week before. Security makes us imprudent; in the midst of my prayers, my veil was moved to one side; besides, in the house of God I thought only of God. I was praying earnestly for my father when Gertrude suddenly touched me on the arm. I needed a second warning to draw me from the sort of religious ecstasy in which I was buried. I raised my head, mechanically glanced around, and to my horror I perceived, leaning against a pillar, and devouring me with his eyes, M. le Duc d'Anjou. A man who seemed his confidant rather than his servant stood near him."

"That is D'Aurilly, his lute-player," said Bussy.

"Yes," answered Diane, "I think that is the name Gertrude mentioned to me later."

"Continue, madame, continue," said Bussy. "I am beginning to understand it all."

"I quickly drew my veil over my face; it was too late. He had seen me, and if he had not recognized me, he was struck with my likeness to the woman he had loved and lost. Uneasy under his glance, the weight of which I felt upon me, I rose and advanced to the door, but found him standing there. He offered me holy water as I passed I pretended not to see him, and did not accept what he offered. Without turning round, I knew that we were followed. Had I known more of Paris, I would have tried to deceive the duke as to my real home; but I had never gone further than from my house to the church, nor did I know any one of whom I could ask a quarter of an hour's hospitality. I had no friend, and only one protector, whom I feared more than an enemy."

"Oh, *mon Dieu!*!" murmured Bussy, "why did not

Heaven, Providence, or chance throw me sooner in your path?"

Diane thanked the young man with a glance.

"But pardon me," said Bussy, "I am always interrupting you, and yet I am dying of curiosity. Continue, I implore you."

"M. de Monsoreau came that evening. I did not know whether or not to mention my adventure, when he himself put an end to my hesitation.

"' You asked me,' he said, ' if you could go to Mass and I replied that you were sovereign mistress of your actions, but that it would be better not to go out. You would not believe me. You went this morning to Sainte-Catherine's. By a chance or fatality, the prince was there, and saw you!'

"' That is true, monsieur; and I hesitated to inform you of that circumstance, because I did not know if the prince had recognized me, or if he had been simply struck by a likeness.'

"' Your face struck him; your likeness to the woman he regrets, appeared to him extraordinary. He followed you, and made inquiries, but could learn nothing as no one knew anything.'

"' *Mon Dieu!* monsieur,' I cried.

"' The duke has a dark and persevering heart,' said the count.

"' Oh, he will forget me, I hope!'

"' I don't believe it; once seen you are never forgotten. I tried my best to forget you, but I did not succeed; and the first passionate look I had noticed flashed at this moment from M. de Monsoreau's eyes. I was more terrified by that flash than I had been that morning by the sight of the prince. I remained silent.

"' What do you intend doing?' asked the count.

"' Monsieur, can I not leave this house, this street, this neighborhood, to go and live at the other end of Paris, or better still, return to Anjou?'

"' All that would be useless,' said M. de Monsoreau shaking his head. 'M. d'Anjou is a terrible blood-hound.'

he is on your track, now ; go where you will, he will follow you till he finds you.'

" ' Oh, *mon Dieu* ! you frighten me.'

" ' That is not my intention. I tell you things as they are, and no more.'

" ' Then I in turn will ask you what you have just asked me. What do you intend to do, monsieur ? '

" ' Alas ! ' replied M. de Monsoreau, with bitter irony, ' I am a man of poor imagination. I had found a way, but it does not suit you. I give it up, but do not ask me to find new ones.'

" ' But, *mon Dieu* ! ' I replied, ' the danger is perhaps less pressing than you think.'

" ' The future will show us that, madame,' said the count, rising. ' At all events, I repeat it, Madame de Monsoreau would have less to fear from the prince, as my new post places me near the king, whose protection would extend over myself and my wife.'

" My only answer was a sigh. What the count had said seemed to me both plausible and reasonable. M. de Monsoreau waited a moment, as if to give me time to answer, but my strength failed me. He was standing ready to withdraw. A bitter smile passed over his lips ; he bowed, and went out. I thought I heard him mutter some oaths as he went downstairs. I called Gertrude, who generally remained in the dressing-room or in the bedroom when the count came ; she hastened to appear. I was standing at the window, wrapped in the curtains, so that I could see into the street without being seen. The count left the house, and walked away. We remained there nearly an hour, watching everything, but no one came. The night passed, but nothing happened.

" The next day when Gertrude went out, she was accosted by a young man whom she recognized as the one who had accompanied the prince the day before ; but she resisted all his offers, and refused to answer his questions. The young man retired after that. This meeting inspired me with a profound terror. It was the beginning of an investigation which would not stop there.

I was afraid M. de Monsoreau would not come that evening, and that some attempt might be made to invade the house during the night. I sent for him, and he came at once. I told him everything, and described the young man.

“‘ It is D’Aurilly,’ he said. ‘ What did Gertrude answer?’

“‘ Gertrude answered nothing at all.’

“‘ M. de Monsoreau reflected for a moment.

“‘ She was wrong,’ he said.

“‘ How so?’

“‘ Yes, we must gain time,’

“‘ Time?’

“‘ I am now still dependent on the Duc d’Anjou, but in a fortnight, in twelve days, in a week perhaps, he will be in my power. We must deceive him, to make him wait.’

“‘ *Mon Dieu!*’

“‘ Certainly, hope will make him patient. A complete refusal would carry him to extremities.’

“‘ Monsieur, write to my father!’ I cried. ‘ He will come and throw himself at the feet of the king, who will take pity on an old man.’

“‘ That will depend on the king’s mood and on the political necessities of the moment which will make him friendly or hostile to the duke. Besides, it would take six days for a messenger to reach your father, and six days for your father to get here. In twelve days, if we do not stop him, M. d’Anjou will have made all the progress he needs.’

“‘ And how can we stop him?’

“‘ M. de Monsoreau did not answer. I understood his thought, and looked down.

“‘ Monsieur,’ said I, after a moment’s pause, ‘ give your orders to Gertrude, and she will follow your instructions.’

“‘ An imperceptible smile passed over the count’s lips at this first appeal to his protection. He talked to Gertrude for a few moments.

“‘ Madame,’ he said to me, ‘ as I might be seen leaving your house, and night will not come for two or three hours

yet, do you permit me to spend these two or three hours in your company ?'

" M. de Monsoreau had almost the right to demand, yet he merely asked. I made him a sign to sit down. I then noticed the wonderful power he had over himself. At the same moment he overcame the sort of embarrassment which resulted from the peculiar position in which we were placed, and his conversation, to which that species of harshness I have observed gave so strong a character, was most varied and interesting. The count had travelled, seen, and thought a great deal, and at the end of two hours I understood the influence obtained over my father by this strange man."

Bussy heaved a sigh.

" When night came on, without insisting or demanding anything else, and apparently satisfied with what he had obtained, he rose and left me. During the evening Gertrude and I returned to our observatory. This time we distinctly saw two men, who examined the house. They approached the door several times. All the interior lights were extinguished, and they could not see us. At about eleven o'clock they went away. The next day, Gertrude, on going out, found the same young man at the same place. He again accosted her, and questioned her as he had done the day before. Gertrude was less severe, and exchanged a few words with him.

" The next day she was more communicative. She told him I was the widow of a counsellor, that I had no fortune, and lived in great retirement. He wished to insist to know more, but was obliged to be contented with what he could learn. The following day D'Aurilly seemed to have some doubts as to the truth of her story. He spoke of Anjou, Beaugé, and even mentioned Méridor. Gertrude answered that all these names were entirely unknown to her. He then acknowledged that he came from the Duc d'Anjou, who had seen me, and was in love with me. After this avowal came magnificent offers for her and for me,—for her, if she would introduce the Prince into the house ; for me, if I would receive him.

" M. de Monsoreau came every evening, and I told him how we stood. He remained with me from eight o'clock until midnight, but his anxiety was evidently very great. On Saturday night he came, paler and more agitated than usual.

" ' Listen,' he said to me ; ' you must promise everything for Tuesday or Wednesday.'

" ' Promise everything,—why ? ' I exclaimed.

" ' Because M. d'Anjou is determined to enter ; and as he is just now on very good terms with the king, there is consequently nothing to expect from the king.'

" ' But between now and Wednesday will anything happen to help me ? '

" ' Perhaps. From day to day I expect that event which will put the prince into my power. I urge it on, not only with my wishes but with my actions. To-morrow I must leave you and go to Montereau.'

" ' You must ! ' I cried with mingled terror and joy.

" ' Yes ; I have there a rendezvous which is indispensable to bring about the event of which I spoke.'

" ' And if we are in the same situation, what must I do ? *Mon Dieu !*'

" ' What can be done against a prince, madame, when I have no right to protect you ? We must yield to evil fortune.'

" ' Oh, my father, my father ! ' I cried.

" The count looked at me.

" ' Oh, monsieur ! '

" ' With what do you reproach me ? '

" ' Oh, nothing !—on the contrary.'

" ' Have I not been devoted as a friend, respectful as a brother ? '

" ' You have behaved throughout as a man of honor.'

" ' Have I not your promise ? '

" ' Yes.'

" ' Have I once reminded you of it ? '

" ' No ! '

" ' And yet when circumstances are such that you find

yourself between shame and honor, you prefer to be the duke's mistress to being my wife !'

" I do not say that, monsieur.'

" Then decide.'

" I have decided.'

" To be Comtesse de Monsoreau ?'

" Rather than the Duc d'Anjou's mistress.'

" Rather than the duke's mistress ! The alternative is flattering !'

" I was silent.

" 'No matter,' said the count ; ' let Gertrude gain time until Tuesday, and on Tuesday we shall see !'

" The next day Gertrude went out as usual, but did not see D'Aurilly. When she returned, we felt more frightened at his absence than we had been at his presence. Gertrude went out a second time, without necessity, and only to meet him, but she did not find him. She went on a third expedition, as fruitless as the first two. I sent Gertrude to M. de Monsoreau. He was gone, and no one knew whither. We were lonely and desolate; we felt weak. For the first time I felt my injustice to the count."

" Oh, madame," cried Bussy, " do not be so hasty in changing your opinion of this man ; there is something in his whole conduct which we do not know, but which we shall know."

" The evening came, accompanied with increasing errors. I was determined to do anything rather than fall alive into the Duc d'Anjou's hands. I had provided myself with this dagger, and I was resolved to stab myself in the prince's presence the moment he or any of his attendants would try to lay hands on me. We barricaded ourselves in our rooms. Through an incredible negligence, the street door had no bolt on the inside. We hid the lamp, and placed ourselves in observation.

" All was quiet until eleven o'clock. At that moment five men came out of the Rue Saint-Antoine, held a council, and hid themselves in a corner near the Hôtel des Tournelles. We began to tremble. These men were probably there for us. However, they remained motionless, and a

quarter of an hour elapsed. At the end of this quarter of an hour, two more men appeared at the corner of the Rue Saint-Paul. The moon, passing between two clouds, enabled Gertrude to recognize D'Aurilly in one of these two men.

“‘ Alas, mademoiselle, it is they,’ murmured the poor girl.

“‘ Yes,’ I replied, trembling with fear; ‘ and the five others are there to lend them assistance.’

“‘ But they will have to break open the door,’ said Gertrude, ‘ and the noise will arouse the neighbors.’

“‘ Why should the neighbors come? Do they know us, and have they any motive to get themselves in difficulties for our defence? Alas! Gertrude, our only real protector is the count.’

“‘ Then why do you always refuse to marry him?’
“‘ I sighed.”

CHAPTER XVI.

THE MARRIAGE (CONTINUED).

“ DURING that time the two men who had appeared at the corner of the Rue Saint-Paul had glided along near the houses and were now under our windows. We carefully opened the casement.

“‘ Are you sure it is here?’ asked a voice.

“‘ Yes, monseigneur, perfectly sure. It is the fifth house from the corner of the Rue Saint-Paul.’

“‘ Do you think the key will fit?’

“‘ I have taken the print of the lock.’

“‘ I seized Gertrude’s arm and pressed it.

“‘ And once we are in?’

“‘ Once inside, that is my business. The servant will admit us, and your Highness has in his pocket a golder key as good as mine.’

“‘ Open, then!’

“‘ We heard the key turn in the lock, but all at once the

men concealed near the Hôtel des Tournelles rushed against the prince and D'Aurilly, crying out, 'To death ! to death !' I could understand nothing of this. I only knew that an unexpected and unhoped-for assistance had come to us, and I fell on my knees giving thanks to Heaven. But the prince had only to show himself, and speak his name, and every sword was sheathed, and each aggressor stepped back."

"Yes, yes," said Bussy ; "they were not there for the prince, but for me."

"At all events," said Diane, "this attack caused the prince to retire. We saw him go through the Rue de Jouy, while the five gentlemen of the ambuscade resumed their places at the corner of the Hôtel des Tournelles. It was evident that the danger was over for that night at least, because these five gentlemen were not there for us. But we were too anxious and excited to go to bed. We remained standing near the window, waiting for some unknown event which we instinctively felt was about to happen. We had not long to wait. A man on horseback appeared in the middle of the Rue Saint-Antoine. He was no doubt the one expected by the five gentlemen, or they no sooner caught sight of him than they cried, 'To arms ! to arms !' and rushed upon him. You know all that followed, as the gentleman was yourself."

"On the contrary, madame," said Bussy, who hoped that the young woman, in the course of her narrative, would betray some secret of her heart,—"on the contrary, I know nothing, for I fainted after the combat."

"It is useless to tell you," said Diane, with a slight blush, "the interest that we took in this combat so unequal and yet so valiantly sustained. Every incident drew from us a shudder, a thrill, a prayer. We saw your horse stagger and fall, and we thought you were lost ; but it was not so. The brave Bussy deserved his reputation. You fell on your feet, and did not even have to rise to strike your enemies. Finally, surrounded, threatened on all sides, you retreated like a lion, facing your foes, and came to lean against our door. Then

Gertrude and I had the same thought, which was to go down and open to you ; she looked at me. 'Yes,' I said, and we both rushed to the stairs. But as I told you before, we had barricaded the door on the inside, and it took us some seconds to move the furniture ; and just as we reached the landing we heard the street door close.

"We both remained motionless. Who was the person who had entered ? I leaned against Gertrude, and we both stood breathlessly waiting. We now heard steps in the passage ; a man appeared at the foot of the stairs, tottered, threw up his arms, and fell on the lowest step. This man was evidently not pursued ; he had put the door, so luckily left open by the duke, between himself and his adversaries, and dangerously, perhaps mortally wounded, he had fallen at the bottom of the stairs. In any case we had nothing to fear, and it was the man who needed our help.

"The lamp ! " I said to Gertrude.

"She ran and returned with a light. We were not mistaken ; you had fainted. We recognized you as the brave gentleman who had so valiantly fought ; and without hesitation we resolved to help you. In one instant you were carried to my room and laid on my bed. You were still unconscious, and a surgeon seemed most necessary. Gertrude remembered having heard of a wonderful cure made a few days before by a young physician of the Rue Beaufreillis. She knew his address and offered to go for him.

"But," said I, "this young man might betray us."

"Be assured that I shall take precautions," said she.

"She is a brave and prudent girl," continued Diane. "I therefore trusted entirely in her. She took some money, a key, and my dagger, and I remained alone near you,—praying for you."

"Alas ! " said Bussy, "I did not know all my happiness."

"A quarter of an hour later, Gertrude returned. She brought the young doctor, who had consented to everything, and came with his eyes bandaged."

"Yes," said Bussy, "at this moment I recovered consciousness. I saw your portrait, and thought I saw you enter."

"I did enter; my anxiety prevailed over my prudence. I questioned the young doctor. He examined our wound, answered for your life, and I felt relieved."

"All that remained in my mind, but it was like a dream," said Bussy. "Yet something told me that I was not dreaming," added the young man, laying his hand on his heart.

"When the doctor had dressed your wound, he drew from his pocket a little phial containing a red liquid, a few drops of which he put on your lips. He told me it was an elixir which would counteract the fever, and produce sleep. In fact, a moment after having swallowed this beverage, you closed your eyes again, and fell back in a sort of faint. I was frightened, but the doctor reassured me. All was going well, he said, and there was nothing more to do, except to let you sleep. Gertrude again undfolded him, and conducted him to the Rue Beaujellis, but she thought she perceived that he counted the steps."

"In fact, madame, he did count them," said Bussy.

"This supposition frightened us. This young man might betray us. We resolved to get rid of every trace of the hospitality we had shown you, but the most important thing was to get rid of you. I summoned all my courage; it was two o'clock in the morning, and the streets were deserted. Gertrude said she could lift you. She succeeded, with my help, and together we carried you to the Temple. Then we returned, terrified at having left you out, two women alone, at an hour when men themselves did not go alone. God was watching over us. Luckily, we met no one, and reached the house unobserved; but when I entered my room, I fainted from exhaustion."

"Oh, madame, madame," said Bussy, clasping his hands, "how can I ever be grateful enough for all your kindness!"

There was a moment's silence, during which Bussy's burning gaze rested on Diane. Her elbow was on the table, and she leaned her head on her hand. In the midst of this silence, the clock of Sainte-Catherine's was heard to strike.

"Two o'clock," cried Diane, in terror,—"two o'clock, and you here!"

"Oh, madame, do not send me away without having told me all,—without pointing out in what way I may be of use to you. Suppose God has given you a brother, and tell this brother what he can do for his sister."

"Alas! nothing, now," said the young woman; "it is too late."

"What happened the next day?" asked Bussy. "What did you do on that day when I thought only of you, and yet did not feel sure that you were not some fancy of my fevered brain?"

"During that day, Gertrude went out and met D'Aurilly. He was more pressing than ever. He said nothing about the events of the night before, but he asked for an interview with his master. Gertrude seemed to consent, but she asked until the following Wednesday—that is to-day—to decide. D'Aurilly promised that his master would control his feelings until then. We had therefore, three days before us. That evening, M. de Monsoreau returned. We told him everything, save the part relating to you. We told him that, the night before the duke had opened the door with a false key, but just as he was about to enter he had been attacked by five gentlemen, among whom were MM. d'Epernon and d'Quélus. I had heard these two names, and I repeated them.

"'Yes, yes,' said the count, 'I heard about that. So he has a false key? I suspected it.'

"'Could we not change the lock?' I asked.

"'He would get another.'

"'Put bolts on the door?'

"'He would come with ten men, and break open door and bolts.'

“ ‘ But this event, which you said would put the duke in your power ? ’

“ ‘ Is postponed, indefinitely perhaps.’

“ I remained silent, with perspiration on my brow. I could no longer conceal from myself that the only way to escape the duke was to become the count’s wife.

“ ‘ Monsieur,’ said I, ‘ the duke has promised to wait until Wednesday night. Will you give me until Tuesday night ? ’

“ ‘ Tuesday night, at this hour, madame, I shall be here,’ and without adding another word, he rose and went out.

“ I followed him with my eyes, but instead of going away, he went over to that dark corner of the Hôtel des Tournelles, and seemed determined to watch over me all night. Every proof of devotion given me by this man was like a stab in my heart. The two days passed like a dash, but nothing disturbed our solitude. Now I cannot describe what I suffered during those two days, as I watched the flight of time. When came the night of the second day, I was crushed. I seemed bereft of feeling, was cold, silent, and, to all appearance, as insensible as a statue. My heart alone was beating, the rest of my body seemed to have ceased living.

“ Gertrude stood near the window. I, seated where I am now, only passed my handkerchief over my brow from time to time. Suddenly, Gertrude extended her hand. This gesture, which in former days would have brought me to my feet, left me insensible.

“ ‘ Madame ! ’ said she.

“ ‘ Well ? ’ I asked.

“ ‘ Four men,—I see four men ! They approach, they open the door, they enter ! ’

“ ‘ Let them enter,’ I replied, without moving.

“ ‘ But those four men are doubtless the duke, D’Aurilly, and two of their followers.’ My only answer was to draw from my bosom my dagger, which I placed near me on the table.

“ ‘ Oh, let me first see,’ said Gertrude, rushing to the door.

“ ‘ See,’ I said.

“ She returned a moment later.

“ ‘ Mademoiselle,’ she said, ‘ it is M. le Comte ! ’

“ I replaced my dagger in my bosom without uttering another word. I only looked towards the count. He was no doubt frightened by my pallor.

“ ‘ Gertrude was telling me that you had taken me for the duke, and that had it been the duke you would have killed yourself.’

“ It was the first time I had ever seen him moved. Was this emotion real or pretended ?

“ ‘ Gertrude did wrong in telling you, monsieur,’ I replied. ‘ Since it was not the duke, all goes well.’

“ There was a pause.

“ ‘ You know that I am not alone ? ’ said the count.

“ ‘ Gertrude saw four men.’

“ ‘ Do you know who they are ? ’

“ ‘ I presume that one is a priest and the other two witnesses.’

“ ‘ You are then ready to become my wife ? ’

“ ‘ Was it not agreed ? Only I remember one clause of the treaty ; it was stipulated that except in a case of urgent necessity, so recognized by me, I would marry you only in presence of my father.’

“ ‘ I remember this clause, mademoiselle ; do you not think there is urgent necessity ? ’

“ ‘ Yes, I think so.’

“ ‘ Well ? ’

“ ‘ Well, I am ready to marry you, monsieur. But remember this ; I shall be your wife only in name until I have seen my father.’

“ The count frowned, and bit his lip.

“ ‘ Mademoiselle,’ he said, ‘ it is not my wish to coerce you. If you have pledged your word, I release you. You are free, only —he approached the window and looked out into the street—‘ only see here,’ he said. I rose, urged by that feeling which prompts us to make

ure of any misfortune, and under the window I perceived a man, wrapped in a cloak, who seemed to be trying to enter the house."

"Oh, *mon Dieu!* you say it was yesterday?" cried Bussy.

"Yes, last night, at nine o'clock."

"Continue," said Bussy.

"A moment later another man joined the first; the latter carried a lantern."

"What do you think of these two men?" asked M. le Monsoreau.

"I think they are the duke and his confidant," I replied."

Bussy groaned.

"Now," continued the count, "command. Shall I remain or withdraw?"

"I wavered for an instant. Yes, in spite of my father's letter, in spite of my promise, in spite of the present palpable, threatening danger, I wavered; and if those two men had not been there—"

"Oh, wretch that I am!" cried Bussy. "The man with the cloak was I, and the one with the lantern was Rémy le Haudoin, that young surgeon you had sent for."

"Was it you?" she cried.

"Yes, I,—I who, more and more convinced of the reality of my dream, tried to find the house where I had been sheltered, the room where I had been transported, the woman, or rather the angel, who had appeared before me. Oh, I was right to call myself unfortunate!" And Bussy remained crushed under the fate which had made use of him to determine Diane to marry the count.

"So you are his wife," he said, after a pause.

"Since yesterday."

There was another pause, only broken by their hurried breathing.

"But you!" suddenly said Diane; "how did you enter this house and come here?"

Bussy silently showed her the key.

"A key!" cried she. "Where did you get it? Who gave it to you?"

"Had not Gertrude promised to admit the prince this very night? The prince had seen M. de Monsoreau and me, as M. de Monsoreau and I had seen him. He feared some snare, and sent me in his place."

"And you accepted this mission?" said Diane, reproachfully.

"It was my only way of getting near you. Will you be so unjust as to reproach me for having sought what is at the same time the greatest joy and the greatest sorrow of my life?"

"Yes," said Diane. "It would have been better for you never to have seen me again, and to forget me."

"No, madame," said Bussy, "you are mistaken. It is God who has sent me here to discover the plans of your enemies. Listen; from the moment I saw you, I devoted my whole life to you. My self-imposed mission is now beginning. You wish to have news of your father?"

"Oh, yes!" cried Diane, "for in truth I don't know what has become of him."

"Well," said Bussy, "I promise to bring you news. Only cherish a kind remembrance of him who henceforth will live for you alone."

"But this key?" said Diane, with anxiety.

"This key," said Bussy, "I return it to you, for I will receive it only from your hands; but I pledge you my word as a gentleman that no sister could confide the key of her apartment to a more devoted or respectful brother."

"I trust to the word of the brave Bussy," said Diane "here, monsieur," and she gave him back the key.

"Madame, in a fortnight we shall know the truth about M. de Monsoreau;" and bowing to Diane with respect mingled with ardent love and sadness,—Bussy disappeared down the stairs.

Diane leaned her head towards the door to listen to the young man's retreating footsteps, and when the noise had long since ceased she still listened with throbbing heart and tearful eyes.

CHAPTER XVII.

HOW KING HENRI III. TRAVELED, AND HOW LONG IT TOOK
HIM TO TRAVEL FROM PARIS TO FONTAINEBLEAU.

THE day, which dawned four or five hours after the events we have just related, saw by the pale light of the sun that barely tipped with silver the edge of a pinkish cloud, the departure of King Henri III. He was going to Fontainebleau, where, as we have already said, a grand hase was projected.

This departure would have been unnoticed for any one else, but like all the acts of this strange prince, whose reign we have endeavored to sketch, it constituted an event by the noise and bustle it caused. In fact, at about eight o'clock in the morning there appeared on the quay of the Louvre, emerging from the gate near the Rue de Astruce, a crowd of gentlemen on service, mounted on good horses, and wrapped in fur cloaks, then pages in great numbers, then lackeys, and finally a company of Swiss guards immediately preceding the royal litter. This litter, drawn by eight mules, richly caparisoned, deserves a special mention.

It was a long machine on four wheels, filled with cushions, and draped on the outside with curtains of brocade. It might have been fifteen feet long, and eight feet wide. In all difficult or steep places the eight mules were replaced by an indefinite number of oxen, whose vigorous strength did not surely add to the rapidity, but gave an assurance of reaching the place of destination, if not one, at least two or three hours later.

This vehicle contained King Henri III., and all his court except the queen, Louise de Vaudemont, who, it must be said, occupied so small a position at her husband's court, save in pilgrimages and processions, that it seems hardly worth while to mention her.

Let us therefore leave aside the poor queen, and say what composed King Henri's court.

The court was composed, first, of King Henri himself then his doctor, Marc Miron, his chaplain, whose name has not been handed down to posterity, his jester, Chicot our old acquaintance, five or six favorites, who were at that moment, Quélus, Schomberg, D'O, D'Epernon, and Maugiron, and a pair of large greyhounds. These animals passed their heads in among all these people, who were either sitting, lying, standing, kneeling, or leaning. There was also a basket of little English dogs, which the king carried on his knees or suspended round his neck by a chain or ribbons. From time to time a dog was taken from a sort of kennel arranged for that purpose and fed all the little ones, while the two greyhounds looked on, rubbed their noses on the chaplet of death's heads which hung at the king's left side, and sure of the favor they enjoyed, did not even take the trouble to be jealous. From the roof of the litter, hung a gilded cage containing the most beautiful turtle doves in the world, white as snow, with two black rings around their necks.

When, by chance, some woman entered the royal litter the menagerie was increased by the addition of two or three monkeys, of the ouistitt or sapajou species, these animals being at that time the favorite pets of the beauties of the court of the Valois.

A statue of Notre-Dame de Chartres, carved in marble for King Henri II. by Jean Goujon, was placed at one end of the litter in a golden niche, and looked down at her divine son, apparently surprised by what she saw.

Therefore, in the numerous pamphlets and satirical verses of the time frequent mention was made of this litter, designated by the name of Noah's ark.

The king was seated at the back of the litter just beneath the statue of Notre-Dame. At his feet Quélus and Maugiron were engaged in plaiting ribbons, the most serious occupation of the young men of that period, some of whom, by the aid of combinations unknown before their time, and lost since then, were able to make plait with twelve pieces. Schomberg, in one corner, embroidered his escutcheon with a new motto which he

thought he had invented himself. In the other corner, the doctor and chaplain conversed together. D'O and Epernon, who had been waked up too early, looked out through the openings and yawned like the greyhounds. Finally, Chicot, seated at the door with his legs dangling outside, to be ready to get in or out at will, sang hymns, recited lampoons, or made anagrams, according to the fashion of the times, finding in each courtier's name a rather disagreeable personality for the one whose individuality was thus disfigured.

On reaching the Place du Châtelet, Chicot began to sing a hymn. The chaplain, who was conversing with the king, turned round with a frown.

"Chicot, my friend," said his Majesty, "take care !lander my favorites, tear my majesty into shreds, say what you will of God, but do not get into difficulties with the Church."

"Thanks for the advice, my son," said Chicot, "I did not see our worthy chaplain talking with the doctor about the last corpse he buried, complaining that it was the third in one day, and that he is always disturbed during his meals. No hymns, you are right ; that is too old. I shall sing you a new song."

"On what air ?" asked the king.

"Always the same," said Chicot, and he began to sing lustily :—

"Our king owes a hundred millions."

"I owe more than that," said the king ; "your song-maker is misinformed."

Chicot, not in the least disconcerted, continued,—

"Henri doit deux cents millions,
Et faut, pour acquitter les dettes
Que messieurs les mignons ont faites,
De nouvelles inventions,
Nouveaux impots, nouvelles tailles,
Qu'il faut du profond des entrailles
Des pauvres sujets arracher,
Malheureux qui traînent leurs vies,
Sous la griffe de ces harpies
Qui avalent tout sans mâcher."

“ Very good,” said Quélus, plaiting his ribbons, “ you have a fine voice ; give us the second verse, my friend.”

“ Say, Valois,” said Chicot, without replying to Quélus “ don’t let your friends call me their friend ; it humiliates me.”

“ Speak in verse, Chicot,” answered the king, “ your prose is worth nothing.”

“ Very good,” said Chicot, and he continued :—

“ Leur parler et leur vêtement
Se voit tel qu’une honnête femme
Aurait peur d’en recevoir blâme,
Vêtue aussi lascivement.
Leur cou se tourne à son aise,
Dedans les replis de leur fraise ;
Déjà le froment n’est plus bon
Pour l’emploi blanc de leur chemise ;
Et faut, pour façon plus exquise,
Faire de riz leur amidon.”

“ Bravo ! ” said the king, “ was it not you, D’O, who invented rice starch ? ”

“ Not at all, sire,” said Chicot ; “ it was M. de Saint Mégrin, who was sent to a better world last year by M. d’Mayenne. The devil ! He counted on the starch and on what he did to M. de Guise to go down to posterity ; you take the starch from him, he will stop half way. And paying no attention to the king, whose face became clouded at this memory, Chicot went on :—

“ Leur poil est tondu au compas.”

“ I am always speaking of the favorites,” interrupted Chicot.

“ Yes, yes, go on,” said Schomberg. Chicot resumed his song :—

“ Leur poil est tondu au compas,
Mais non d’une façon pareille,
Car en avant, depuis l’oreille,
Il est long, et derrière bas.”

" Your song is already old," said D'Epernon.

" Old ! It was made yesterday."

" Well, the fashion changed this morning—look !" and D'Epernon took off his cap to show Chicot that his hair was cut almost as short in front as in the back.

" Oh, what an ugly head !" said Chicot, continuing :—

" Leurs cheveux droits par artifice,
Par la gomme qui les hérisse,
Retordent leurs plis réfrisés ;
Et dessus leur tête légère,
Un petit bonnet par derrière
Les rend encore plus déguisés."

" I skip the fourth verse," said Chicot, " it is too immoral ; " and he resumed his song :—

" Pensez vous que nos vieux Français,
Qui par leurs armes valeureuses
En tant de guerres dangereuses
Ont fait retentir leurs exploits ;
Et pendant le fruit de leur gloire,
Avec le nom de leur victoire,
En tant de périlleux hasards,
Eussent la chemise empesée,
Eussent la perruque frisée,
Eussent le teint blanchi de fards ? "

" Bravo !" said Henri ; " and if my brother were here he would be very grateful to you."

" Whom do you call your brother, my son ? " asked Chicot. " Is it by chance Joseph Foulon, abbé of Sainte-Genevieve, in whose convent I hear you are to take ows ? "

" No," said Henri, who humored Chicot in all his jests, I speak of my brother François."

" Ah, you are right ! That one is not your brother in God, but your brother in the devil. Good, good ! you are speaking of François de Valois, by the grace of God, duke of Brabant, Lauthier, Luxemburg, Gueldres, Alençon, Anjou, Touraine, Berry, Évreux and Château-Thierry, count of Flanders, Holland, Zealand, Zutphen,

Maine, Perche, Mantes, Meulan, and Beaufort, marquis of the Holy Empire, lord of Frise and Malines, defender of the Belgian liberty, to whom nature gave one nose, to which the small-pox added another, and about whom composed the following verse :—

“ Gentlemen, show not surprise
If Francis hath a double nose ;
For Nature doth indeed seem wise,
To double face give double nose.”

The favorites burst out laughing, for the Duc d'Anjou was their personal enemy, and the epigram about the prince made them forget for the moment the lampoon that Chicot had just been singing about them. As for the king, who up to this time had been spared by these scathing remarks, he laughed louder than any, giving sugar and pastry to his dogs, and ruthlessly attacking both friends and foes. All at once Chicot exclaimed,—

“ Oh, it is bad policy ! Henri, Henri, it is bold and imprudent.”

“ What ? ” asked the king.

“ No, really, you shouldn't acknowledge these things Fie ! ”

“ What things ? ” said Henri, astonished.

“ What you say yourself when you sign your name Ah, Henriet ! Ah, my son ! ”

“ Beware, sire ! ” said Quélus, who suspected some treachery under Chicot's honeyed manner.

“ What the devil do you mean ? ” asked the king.

“ Come now, how do you sign ? Tell me.”

“ I sign—I sign—I sign—‘ Henri de Valois.’ ”

“ Very well. Now observe, gentlemen, that I did not make him say it. Come, can't we find a *V* in these thirteen letters ? ”

“ Certainly, Valois begins with a *V*.”

“ Take your tablets, Sir Chaplain. Here is the name under which we must henceforth know the king. Henri de Valois is only an anagram.”

“ How so ? ”

" Yes, an anagram ; I shall tell you the real name of his own reigning Majesty. We say in Henri de Valois there is a *V* ; put *V* on your tablets."

" I have done it," said D'Epernon.

" Is there not also an *i* ? "

" Certainly, the last letter of the word Henri."

" See the maliciousness of men ! " said Chicot. What an idea it was to separate letters thus made to go together. Put an *i* next to the *V*. Have you done it ? "

" Yes," said D'Epernon.

" Let us look and see if we shall not find an *l* ; it is here. An *a* ; it is also there. Another *i* ; we have it. Finally an *n*. Now, can you read, Nogaret ? "

" To my shame, I can."

" Come, knave, do you think yourself of such exalted rank that you have the right to be ignorant ? "

" Rascal," said D'Epernon, raising his cane on Chicot.

" Strike, but spell," said the jester.

D'Epernon began to laugh, and spelt, "*Vilain*, villain."

" Good," cried Chicot. " You see, Henri, we have found your real Christian name. I hope you will give me pension like that served to M. Amyot by our brother, Charles IX., when I shall have found your surname."

" You will have yourself caned, Chicot," said the king.

" Where do they grow canes with which gentlemen are eaten ? Is it in Poland, my son ? Tell me."

" Yet it seems that M. de Mayenne did not spare your neck the day he surprised you with his mistress, my poor Chicot," said Quélus.

" Therefore, that is an account which still remains to be settled. Be assured, Monsieur Cupido, that the memory of the thing is here." And Chicot put his hand to his head, which shows that even in those days the head was recognized as the seat of memory.

" Come, Quélus," said D'Epernon, " you will see that, thanks to you, we shall not be told the surname."

" Fear nothing," said Chicot ; " to M. de Guise I would say, I hold it by the horns ; but to you, Henri, I shall merely say, I have it by the ears."

" Let us see the name, let us see the name ! " said all the young men.

" We must first find a capital *H* in the rest of the letters we have. Take the *H*, Nogaret."

D'Epernon obeyed.

" Then an *e*, then an *r*; then yonder, in Valois, an *o* then, as you separate the name from the surname by what grammarians call the particle, we will take us a *u* and an *e*; by adding the *s*, which is the last letter of the name, we have— Spell, D'Epernon."

" *Herodes*, Hérodes," said D'Epernon.

" Vilain Hérodes ! " cried the king.

" Exactly," said Chicot; " and that is what you sing every day. Oh ! " And Chicot threw himself back with every sign of pious horror.

" Monsieur Chicot, you go too far," said Henri.

" I," said Chicot, " I only tell you things as they are, but that is just like kings,—warn them, and they get angry."

" You have given me a fine genealogy," said the king.

" Do not disown it, my son," said the jester. " *Ventre de biche* ! it is the right one for a king who needs the Jews at least two or three times every month."

" It is decided that this rascal will not have the last word," cried the king. " Gentlemen, let us all be silent at least in that way no one will reply to him."

At that same moment the deepest silence reigned, and this silence, which Chicot, absorbed in gazing at the streets through which they passed, seemed in no way disposed to break, had already lasted some minutes when just beyond the Place Maubert, at the corner of the Rue des Noyers, Chicot rushed out of the litter, pushed aside the guards, and knelt down before a house of good appearance, with a carved wooden balcony hanging over the street.

" Hey, pagan ! " cried the king, " if you must kneel, let it be before the cross, in the middle of Rue Sainte Genevieve, and not before this house. Does it contain some church or relic ? "

But Chicot did not reply. He had thrown himself on both knees on the pavement, and recited aloud this prayer, not a word of which was lost by the king, who listened attentively.

"Good God ! just God ! here is,—I recognize it, and shall always recognize it,—here is the house where Chicot suffered ; if not for thee, O God ! at least for one of thy creatures. I have never prayed for vengeance on M. de Mayenne, author of my martyrdom, nor on Master Nicolas David, his instrument. No, Lord ! Chicot can wait, for Chicot is patient though he is not eternal ; and now for six years, including one leap year, Chicot has been adding up the interests of the little open account between himself, MM. de Mayenne, and Nicolas David. Now, at ten per cent, which is the legal rate, since the king borrows at that rate, the accumulated interest doubles the principal in seven years. Therefore, great and just God ! may my patience endure for another year, so that the fifty blows with a stirrup-strap which I received in this house, by the orders of that assassin of a Lorraine prince and that bully of a Norman lawyer, and which drew from my body a pint of blood, should amount to two pints and a hundred blows for each of them. So that M. de Mayenne, fat as he is, and Nicolas David, long as he is, will no longer have blood or hide enough to pay Chicot, and will be reduced to a bankruptcy of fifteen or twenty per cent, expiring under the eightieth or eighty-fifth blow of the rod. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, Amen !"

"Amen !" said the king.

Chicot kissed the ground, and to the great surprise of all the bystanders, who could understand nothing of this scene, he returned to the litter.

"Now," said the king, whose rank, deprived of so many prerogatives during the last four years, gave him at least the right to be the first informed, "what was the meaning of this long and singular litany ? Why all these blows on the breast ? Why all these mummeries before a house so profane in appearance ?"

“ Sire,” replied the jester, “ it means that Chicot is like the fox ; he smells and licks the stones where his blood fell, until on those very stones he can crush the heads of those who spilled it.”

“ Sire,” cried Quélus, “ I would wager that Chicot pronounced in his prayer, and your Majesty may have heard it, the name of M. de Mayenne ; I would wager that this prayer had reference to the bastinade of which we spoke just now.”

“ Wager, Seigneur Jacques de Lévis, Comte de Quélus,” said Chicot,—“ wager, and you will win.”

“ Therefore ? ” said the king.

“ Exactly, sire,” continued Chicot. “ In this house lived a woman whom Chicot loved,—a good and charming creature, a lady. One night when he came to see her, a certain jealous prince had the house surrounded, had Chicot seized, and beaten so hard that he passed through the window, and not having time to open it, he jumped from that balcony into the street. Now, as it is a miracle that he was not killed, each time that Chicot passes before that house he kneels down and prays, and in his prayer thanks the Lord for his escape. Ah, poor Chicot ! and you condemned him, sire ; yet I think such conduct is that of a good Christian.”

“ You were, then, well beaten, my poor Chicot ? ”

“ Oh, marvellously well, sire ; yet not as much as he would have liked.”

“ How so ? ”

“ No, in truth ; I would not have been sorry to have received a few sword thrusts.”

“ For your sins ? ”

“ No, for those of M. de Mayenne.”

“ Ah, I understand ; your intention is to render unto Cæsar—”

“ Not Cæsar,—no sire ; let us make no mistakes. Cæsar is the great general, the valiant warrior, the elder brother, the one who wishes to be King of France ; no, that one has an account with Henri de Valois. That

account is your business. Pay your debts, my son ; I shall pay mine."

Henri did not like to hear his cousin of Guise mentioned ; therefore, Chicot's speech left him serious,—so much so that Bicêtre was reached before the interrupted conversation was resumed. It had taken three hours to go from the Louvre to Bicêtre. The optimists expected to reach Fontainebleau the next night, while the pessimists offered bets that they would arrive on the day after, towards noon. Chicot pretended that they would not arrive at all.

Once outside of Pairs, the procession seemed to move easily, the morning was fine, the wind blew with less violence. The sun had succeeded in shining through the veil of mists and one might have thought it was one of those fine October days during which the eyes of the wanderer seem to penetrate the mysterious blue depths of the murmuring woods.

It was three o'clock in the afternoon when they reached the walls of Juvisy. From that point could be perceived the bridge built on the Orge and the great hostelry of the tour de France, which sent on the evening breeze the perfume of its kitchen and the joyous echoes of its hearth.

These culinary odors did not escape Chicot's nose. He leaned out of the litter and saw before the inn several men enveloped in their cloaks. Among these was a short and stout individual whose wide-brimmed hat entirely hid his face.

These men entered hastily when they perceived the procession, but not before the stout person had had time to attract Chicot's attention. Therefore, just as the stout man disappeared through the door, our Gascon jumped out of the royal litter, and taking his horse from the page who held it, he hid in the corner of the wall, and sheltered by the shades of approaching night, he watched the royal *cortège*, vanishing in the direction of Essonnes where the king intended to pass the night ; then, when the last horsemen were out of sight, when the rumbling of the wheels on the pavement of the road could no

longer be heard, he left his hiding-place, rode around the *château*, and presented himself at the door of the inn, coming from the direction of Fontainebleau. As he passed the window, Chicot threw a rapid glance through the glass and saw with pleasure that the men he had noticed were still there, among them the short, fat man whom he had honored with such particular attention. Only, as Chicot seemed to have his reasons for not wishing to be recognized by the said individual, instead of entering the room where he was, he asked for a bottle of wine in the opposite one, and placed himself so that he could see everyone going to the door.

From the position he had chosen, Chicot was in the shadow and could see as far as the chimney-corner ; and there, seated on a stool, was the short, stout individual who, doubtless thinking he had nothing to fear, allowed his face to be lit up by the glow of a bright wood fire.

“ I was not mistaken,” said Chicot, “ and when I said my prayer before the house of the Rue des Noyers, I almost scented this man. But why does he return thus quietly to the capital of our friend Hérodes ? Why does he hide from him ? Ah, Pilate ! Pilate ! will God refuse to grant me the year I asked, and force me to pay sooner than I expected ? ”

Chicot soon had the joy of discovering that from his seat he could not only see, but thanks to some curious acoustical phenomenon, due to chance, he could also hear. Having observed this, he listened as attentively as he had been looking.

“ Gentlemen,” said the stout man to his companions, “ I think it is time to set out ; the last lackey of the *cortège* is out of sight, and I believe that the road is now safe.”

“ Perfectly safe, monseigneur,” said a voice that made Chicot tremble, and which proceeded from an individual to whom he had as yet paid no attention, absorbed as he was in contemplating the principal personage. The individual who possessed the voice was as tall as the man

whom he addressed as monseigneur was short, as pale as e was red, as obsequious as he was arrogant.

" Ah, Maître Nicolas," said Chicot to himself, with a silent laugh. " *Tu quoque?* Very good ! It will be most unfortunate if we separate this time without exchanging a few words." He emptied his glass and paid his reckoning, that nothing might keep him when he would be ready to leave.

This precaution was not useless, for the seven persons who had attracted Chicot's attention also paid,—or rather, the stout man paid for all,—and each one, taking his horse from the groom who held it, mounted. The whole party then set out towards Paris, and were soon lost in the dusky shadows of night.

" Good ! " said Chicot, " he is going to Paris ; then I shall go also." And mounting in turn, he followed them from a distance, never losing sight of their gray cloaks, or, when he prudently dropped behind, never out of hearing of the gallop of their horses. All this cavalcade left the road of Fromenteau, cut across country to reach Choisy, then passing the Seine at Charenton, entered by the porte Saint-Antoine, to disappear like a swarm of bees into the Hôtel de Guise, the doors of which closed behind them.

" Oh," said Chicot, placing himself at the corner of the rue des Quatre-Fils, " there is not only Mayenne, but Guise under all this. It was simply curious, but it will become interesting. Let us wait ; " and he waited for a full hour in spite of hunger and cold that both attacked him with sharp teeth. At last the door reopened, but instead of seven cavaliers wrapped in their cloaks, there appeared seven monks of Sainte-Genevieve, with theiroods over their faces and carrying enormous rosaries.

" Oh, oh ! " said Chicot, " this was unexpected. Is the Hôtel de Guise so embalmed in sanctity that wolves change into lambs of the Lord by only touching the threshold ? This becomes more and more interesting."

Chicot followed the monks, as he had followed the cavaliers, not doubting that beneath the cowls were con-

cealed the same bodies that had been covered by the cloaks. The monks passed the Seine over the bridge of Notre-Dame, crossed the Cité, and the Petit-Pont, walked through the Place Maubert, and up the Rue Sainte-Genevieve.

"Oh," said Chicot, raising his hat at the house of the Rue des Noyers before which he had knelt that morning, "are we returning to Fontainebleau? In that case we have not taken the shortest road. But, no, I am mis-taken; we shall not go so far."

In fact, the monks had just stopped at the gate of the Abbey of Sainte-Genevieve, and passed the porch on which stood another monk of the same order, who attentively examined the hand of each one as he passed.

"*Tudieu!*" thought Chicot, "it seems that to gain admittance into the abbey to-night one must have clean hands. Decidedly, something extraordinary is taking place."

Having made this reflection, Chicot was rather embarrassed as to what course he should pursue not to lose sight of the individuals he had followed, and looked around him. He saw, with astonishment, monks appearing from every street leading to the abbey,—some alone, some walking in pairs, but all going to the abbey.

"Ah," muttered Chicot, "is there a general chapter at the abbey to-night, that all the monks of France should be convened to it? Upon my word as a gentleman, this is the first time I have ever wished to be present at a chapter, but I confess the wish is very strong." And the monks all disappeared through the gate, showing their hands, or something they held in their hands.

"I would enter with them," thought Chicot, "but for that I need two essential things: first, the holy dress that covers them,—for I perceive no layman among these saintly personages; and secondly, that thing they show the doorkeeper,—because they do show something. Ah Brother Gorenflot, if I only had you here, my worthy friend."

This exclamation was drawn from Chicot at the

memory of one of the most venerable monks of the order of Sainte-Genevieve, who was Chicot's usual companion when the jester did not take his meals at the Louvre. It was the same one with whom our Gascon had stopped to breakfast the day of the procession, when they had eaten together a teal-duck, and a bottle of spiced wine. The monks continued to arrive in such numbers that it seemed that half the population of Paris must have taken the frock, and the doorkeeper examined each one with the same attention.

"Come, come, there must be something extraordinary o-night," said Chicot. "I shall be curious to the end. It is half-past seven; the collection is over, and I shall find Gorenfot at the Corne d'Abondance. He will be at upper."

Chicot left this legion of monks to perform their evolutions in the vicinity of the abbey, and starting off at a gallop, he went to the Rue Sainte-Jacques, where, opposite the monastery of Saint-Benoît, arose the flourishing tavern of the Corne d'Abondance, much frequented by students and monks. Chicot was known in this place, not as one of the regular patrons, but as one of those mysterious guests who came from time to time to leave a gold coin, and a part of their reason, in the establishment owned by Maître Claude Bonhomet. This was the name of the worthy host who dispensed the gifts of Eres and Bacchus, always poured out of the mythological cornucopia, which was the sign of the house.

CHAPTER XVIII.

WHERE THE READER WILL MAKE THE ACQUAINTANCE OF BROTHER GORENFLOT, WHO HAS ALREADY BEEN MENTIONED TWICE IN THE COURSE OF THIS NARRATIVE.

THE beautiful day had been followed by a beautiful evening, only as the day had been cold, the evening was

even colder. Under the hat of the belated bourgeois, his breath could be seen to condense itself. The footsteps of the passers-by could be distinctly heard on the frozen soil, and the sonorous *hum* produced by the cold, and reverberated by the elastic surfaces, as a physicist of our day would say. In fact, there was one of those frosts which lend a double charm to the ruddy light of the windows of an inn. Chicot first entered the public room, looked around in all the corners, but not finding among Maître Claude's guests the one he sought, he went familiarly into the kitchen. The master of the establishment was reading some pious book while a large quantity of grease contained in an immense frying-pan was reaching the degree of heat necessary for receiving a dish of whiting lying in flour.

He turned at the sound of Chicot's step.

"Ah, it is you, monsieur!" he said, closing his book; "good-evening, and good appetite to you!"

"Thank you for the double wish, though one is made as much for your profit as for mine; but that will depend."

"How so?"

"You know I hate to eat alone."

"If necessary, monsieur," replied Bonhomet, lifting his cap, "I will sup with you."

"Thank you, my dear host, although I know you to be an excellent companion. I am seeking some one."

"Brother Gorenflot, perhaps?"

"Exactly," said Chicot. "Has he begun his supper?"

"Not yet; but make haste, nevertheless."

"Make haste?"

"Yes, for in five minutes he will have finished."

"Brother Gorenflot has not begun his supper, and in five minutes he will have finished, you say?" And Chicot shook his head,—a sign which in all countries stands for incredulity.

"Monsieur," said Maître Claude, "to-day is Wednesday, and we are beginning Lent."

"Well," said Chicot, in a manner that proved little in favor of Gorenflot's religious tendencies, "what next?"

Bonhomet shrugged his shoulders with an air that seemed to say, "I understand no better than you, but such is the case."

"Well," said Chicot, "something must be decidedly out of order in the sublunary machine. Five minutes for Gorenflo's supper! I am fated to see miraculous things to-day."

And with the air of a traveller who sets foot on unknown soil, Chicot advanced to a sort of private closet. He opened the glass door, protected by a red and white plaid woollen curtain, and perceived by the light of a smoky candle the worthy monk, who was negligently burning on his plate a small portion of boiled spinach, which he tried to make more savory by introducing some scraps of Surénes cheese into this herbaceous substance.

While the good brother makes this mixture, with an expression which shows that he has but little faith in this combination, let us present him to our readers. Brother Gorenflo was thirty-eight years of age, and five feet high. This stature was rather short; but what he lacked in height he had in width, measuring three feet in diameter from shoulder to shoulder, which we know is equal to nine feet in circumference. Between these herculean shoulders rose a huge neck, the muscles of which stood out like cords. Unfortunately, this neck also partook of the same proportions; that is, it was short and thick, which might make Brother Gorenflo liable to apoplexy, should he suffer any violent emotions. But knowing this predisposition, and the danger thereof, he never had any emotions; it was even very unusual to see him so visibly disturbed as he was when Chicot entered the room.

"Ah, what are you doing here, my friend?" cried our Gascon, looking from the dish of greens to Gorenflo, and from the unsnuffed candle to a glass filled to the brim with water scarcely colored by a few drops of wine.

"You see, my brother, I am supping," said Gorenflo, with a voice as powerful as the bell of his convent.

"You call that supper—you, Gorenflo? Greens and cheese! Come now!" cried Chicot.

" This is the first Wednesday of Lent : we must think of our salvation, brother ; we must think of our salvation ! " answered Gorenfot, speaking through his nose, and raising his eyes to heaven in a most sanctimonious way.

Chicot stopped in astonishment. His look indicated that he had often seen Gorenfot glorify the holy season of Lent in a very different manner.

" Our salvation ! " he ejaculated, " and what in the devil have greens and water to do with our salvation ? "

" We are forbidden to eat meat on Wednesdays and Fridays," said Gorenfot.

" But when did you breakfast ? "

" I have not breakfasted," said the monk, talking more and more through his nose.

" Ah, if we must talk through our noses, I can hold my own with all the monks of the world," said Chicot. " Well, if you have not breakfasted, what have you done, my friend ? "

" I have composed a discourse," said Gorenfot, proudly raising his head.

" Ah, a discourse ! And what for ? "

" To deliver this evening at the abbey."

" Well," thought Chicot, " a discourse this evening, most peculiar ! "

" And I must even be thinking of going," added Gorenfot, carrying to his mouth the first spoonful of spinach and cheese ; " my audience is perhaps getting impatient."

Chicot thought of the infinite number of monks he had seen going to the abbey, and remembering that M. de Mayenne was in all probability among them, he wondered why Gorenfot, who had never counted eloquence as one of his talents, had been selected by his superior, Joseph Foulon, to preach before the Lorraine prince and such a large assembly.

" Ah," said he, " and at what hour do you preach ? "

" From nine to half past."

" Well, it is a quarter before nine. You can spare me-

ive minutes. *Ventre de biche!* it is now more than a week since we have dined together."

" It is not our fault," said Gorenflot, " and our friendship does not suffer through it, I assure you. Your duties keep you confined near our great king, Henri III., whom I pray God to bless ; my duties leave me no time. It is not surprising that we should be separated."

" Yes," said Chicot, " but, *corbœuf!* all the more reason to be merry when we meet."

" Therefore, I am very merry," said Gorenflot, with a spiteous air, " yet I must leave you ;" and the monk made a motion to rise.

" At least, finish your greens," said Chicot, putting his hand on his companion's shoulder and forcing him to sit down.

Gorenflot looked at the spinach and sighed ; then his eyes fell on the water, and he turned away his head. Chicot saw that the time had come to begin the attack. " You remember that little dinner I was just talking about, eh ? " he said, " at the Porte Montmartre, you know. While King Henri was scourging himself and others, we had a teal from the marshes of the Grange Batelière, with a sauce made with crabs, and we drank that nice Burgundy,—what do you call it ? Did you not discover it ? "

" It is a wine from my country,—*La Romanée.*"

" Yes, yes, I remember. It is the milk you sucked as a baby, worthy son of Noah."

Gorenflot passed his tongue over his lips with a sad smile.

" What do you think of that wine ? " asked Chicot.

" It was good," said the monk, " but there is better."

" This is what I heard the other night from our host, Claude Bonhomet, who pretends that he has in his cellar fifty bottles, compared to which that of the Porte Montmartre is poor."

" It is true," said Gorenflot.

" What ? True ! " cried Chicot, " and you drink that abominable water when you have only to extend your arm

to drink such wine as that? Fie!" and Chicot seized the glass and threw the contents on the floor.

"There is a time for everything," said Gorenflot. "Wine is good when we have nothing to do but to glorify God who made it; but when one has a speech to make, water is preferable for its effects if not for its taste: *facunda est aqua.*"

"Pooh!" said Chicot. "*Magis facundum est vinum;* and the proof is that I, who have also a speech to make, and who have faith in my receipt, am going to order a bottle of that Romanée wine. What do you advise me to take with it?"

"Don't take these greens," said the monk; "they are execrable."

"Bzzzou!" said Chicot, taking Gorenflot's plate and raising it to his nose, "bzzzou!" And this time he opened the window and flung the plate and contents into the street. Then turning round, "Maître Claude!" he cried.

The host, who probably expected to be called, appeared on the threshold.

"Maître Claude, bring me two bottles of your Romanée which you declare so excellent."

"Why two bottles?" said Gorenflot. "You know I am not drinking."

"If you were drinking, I would order four bottles, six bottles, all the bottles in the house," said Chicot; "but when I drink alone, I drink poorly, and two bottles suffice."

"Yes," replied Gorenflot, "two bottles are reasonable, and if you eat no meat, your confessor will have nothing to say."

"Certainly," said Chicot, "meat on a Wednesday of Lent,—fie!" And going to the larder while Bonhomet disappeared in search of the two bottles ordered, he drew out a fine capon.

"What are you doing there?" asked Gorenflot, who followed all the Gascon's movements with involuntary interest. "What are you doing there?"

" You see, I am taking possession of this carp, for fear some other will lay hands on it. In Lent there is a great demand for eatables of this sort."

" A carp ? " said Gorenflot, surprised.

" Of course," said Chicot, displaying the tempting fowl before his eyes.

" Since when has a carp had a beak ? " asked the monk.

" A beak ? " said the Gascon. " Where do you see a beak ? I only see a nose."

" Wings ? " continued the worthy friar.

" Fins."

" Feathers ? "

" Scales, my dear Gorenflot ; you are drunk."

" Drunk ! " cried Gorenflot, " drunk !—I who have eaten nothing but spinach and drunk nothing but water?"

" Well, your spinach is weighing on your stomach and your water has gone to your head."

" *Parbleu !* " said Gorenflot, " here is our host ; he will decide."

" What ? "

" Whether it is a carp or a capon."

" Very well, but let him first uncork the wine. I wish to know if it is the same. Uncork, Maître Claude."

Maître Claude opened a bottle and poured out half a glass for Chicot, who swallowed it and smacked his lips.

" Ah," he said, " I am a bad taster, and my tongue has no memory. I cannot say whether it is better or worse than the one of the Porte Montmartre, or even the same."

Gorenflot's eyes glittered as they watched a few drops of the ruby colored liquid which remained in the bottom of the glass.

" Here, brother," said Chicot, pouring a thimbleful into the monk's glass. " In this world you must help your neighbour, so help me."

Gorenflot took the glass, raised it to his lips, and slowly drank the small quantity of liquid it contained. " It is the same wine, but—"

“ But ? ” repeated Chicot.

“ But I had too little to be able to say if it is better or worse.”

“ I am anxious to know,” said Chicot. “ *Peste !* I don’t wish to be deceived ; and if you had not an address to make, I would beg you to taste that wine a second time.”

“ I shall do so to please you,” said the monk.

“ *Pardieu !* ” said Chicot, as he half filled his friend’s glass.

Gorenflot raised it to his lips with no less respect than the first time, and tasted it as conscientiously.

“ Better, better, I assure you,” he said.

“ Pshaw ! you have an understanding with our host.”

“ A good drinker,” said Gorenflot, “ ought, at the first draught to recognize the wine, at the second the quality, at the third the age.”

“ Oh, the age ! ” said Chicot, “ I should like to know it about this wine.”

“ That is very easy,” said Gorenflot, holding out his glass ; “ give me two drops, and I will tell you.”

Chicot nearly filled the glass, and the monk drank it slowly. “ 1561,” he said as he set down the glass.

“ Noël ! ” cried Claude Bonhomet, “ 1561,—that is just it.”

“ Brother Gorenflot,” said the Gascon, “ Rome has canonized many men who did not deserve it as you do.”

“ A little habit, my friend,” modestly replied the monk.

“ And talent ; habit alone is not sufficient. Look at me, who pretend to have some habit. Well, what are you doing ? ”

“ I am rising, as you see.”

“ What for ? ”

“ To go to my meeting.”

“ Without eating a piece of my carp ? ”

“ Ah, that is true,” said Gorenflot. “ It seems, good friend, that you have even less knowledge of eating than of drinking. Maître Bonhomet, what animal is that ? ” and Brother Gorenflot pointed to the object of the con-

troversy. The innkeeper looked in surprise at the one who asked this question.

"Yes," said Chicot, "we ask you what animal that is."

"*Parbleu!*!" said the host, "it is a capon."

"A capon!" repeated Chicot, with an air of consternation.

"Yes, and from the Mans," added Maître Claude.

"Well!" said Gorenflot, triumphant.

"Well," said Chicot, "it seems I was mistaken; but as I am very anxious to eat of this capon, yet do not wish to sin, will you be good enough, dear brother, to sprinkle a few drops of holy water on it, and christen it carp?"

"Ah, ah!" said Gorenflot.

"Yes," said the Gascon, "I beg you to do it, otherwise I might perhaps eat some animal in a state of mortal sin."

"Very well," said Gorenflot, who was naturally amiable, and had moreover been put in a good humor by the wine he had tasted; "but there is no more water."

"It is said, I don't remember where," continued Chicot, "'In a case of necessity, use whatever is at hand.' The intention is everything. Baptize with wine, brother, baptize with wine. The animal will perhaps be a little less catholic, but none the less good," and Chicot filled the monk's glass to the brim. The first bottle was finished.

"In the name of Bacchus, Comus, and Momus, trinity of the great Saint Pantagruel, I christen thee carp," said Gorenflot; and dipping the tips of his fingers into the wine, he sprinkled two or three drops on the capon.

"Now," said the Gascon, touching the monk's glass with his own, "here is the health of the newly baptized one; may it be cooked to the right point, and may Maître Claude Bonhomet's art add to the many qualities with which nature has endowed it."

"To its very good health," said Gorenflot, interrupting a very hearty laugh to swallow the glass of Burgundy poured out by Chicot. "*Morbleu!* this is famous wine."

"Maître Claude," said Chicot, "put this carp at once

on the spit, cover it with fresh butter in which you will chop up bacon and shalots ; then, when it begins to brown, put two pieces of toast in the frying-pan, and serve it hot."

Gorenflot did not say a word, but he showed his approval by a nod and a glance.

" Now," said Chicot, when he saw his directions obeyed, " some sardines, Maître Bonhomet, some tunny-fish. We are in Lent, as our pious Brother Gorenflot was just now observing, and I wish to abstain from meat at my dinner. But wait a second ! Bring me two more bottles of that excellent Romanée wine of 1561."

The odors from the kitchen, which recalled the savory cooking of the south, so dear to all true epicures, were now spreading, and gradually went to the monk's head. His mouth watered, his eyes shone, but he contained himself, and even made a motion to rise.

" So you leave me now, just before the battle ? " said Chicot.

" I must, brother," said Gorenflot, rolling up his eyes to show heaven the sacrifice he was making.

" It is very imprudent to preach fasting."

" Why ? " stammered the monk.

" Because your mind would fail you. Galen has said, ' Pulmo hominis facile deficit.' (' Man's lungs are weak, and fail easily. ')"

" Alas, yes," said Gorenflot. " I have often felt it myself. Had I had the lungs, I would have been a great orator."

" You see ! " said Chicot.

" Fortunately," continued Gorenflot, falling back on his chair,—" fortunately, I have zeal."

" Yes, but zeal is not sufficient. In your place, I would taste these sardines, and drink a few more drops of this nectar."

" Only one sardine, and one glass," said Gorenflot.

Chicot laid the sardine on the monk's plate, and gave him the second bottle. The friar ate the sardine, and drank the contents of the glass.

" Well," said Chicot, who, though he pressed his companion to eat and drink, kept himself very sober,— " well ! "

" In fact, I feel stronger," said Gorenflot.

" *Ventre de biche !*" cried Chicot, " when one has a sermon to preach, the question is not to feel stronger, but to feel altogether well ; and in your place," continued the Gascon, " to obtain that result, I would eat the two fins of that carp. If you do not eat a little you are in danger of feeling the wine. *Merum sobrio male olet.*"

" The devil ! " said Gorenflot, " you are right ; I had not thought of that." And as at this moment the capon was brought in, Chicot cut off one of the legs, which he called fins, and which the monk soon despatched.

" Body of Christ ! " said Gorenflot, " this is savory fish."

Chicot cut off the other fin, which he laid on the monk's plate, while he helped himself to the wing.

" And famous wine," he added, uncorking the third bottle.

Once started, once warmed up, once stirred in the depths of his immense stomach, Gorenflot had not the strength to control himself. He devoured the wing, made a skeleton of the carcass, and calling Bonhomet :

" Maître Claude," he said, " I am very hungry ; did you not offer me an omelet just now ? "

" Certainly," said Chicot, " there is even one ordered. Eh, Bonhomet ? "

" Yes," said the innkeeper, who never contradicted his customers when what they said tended to increase their expenses.

" Well, bring it, bring it ! " said the monk.

" In five minutes," answered the host, who, understanding a wink from Chicot, went hastily to prepare what was ordered.

" Ah ! " said Gorenflot, letting fall on the table his immense fist, armed with a fork. " I feel better."

" I knew it," said Chicot.

" And if the omelet were here, I would eat it in one mouthful, as I drink this wine at one gulp." And the

monk swallowed one fourth of the third bottle, while his eyes shone.

“ Ah, you were then ill ? ”

“ I was a fool, my friend,” said Gorenflot. “ That cursed speech made me ill. It has weighed on my mind for three days.”

“ It must be magnificent.”

“ Splendid.”

“ Tell me some of it while we are waiting for the omelet.”

“ Not at all ! ” cried Gorenflot. “ A sermon at table ? Where have you seen that done ? At the court of the king, your master ? ! ”

“ We have very fine sermons at the court of King Henri ; may God protect him ! ” said Chicot, doffing his hat.

“ On what subjects ? ”

“ On virtue.”

“ Ah, yes ! ” cried the monk, leaning back in his chair ; “ your king is a virtuous man.”

“ I don’t know if he is virtuous or no,” replied the Gascon ; “ but I know I have never seen anything there that caused me to blush.”

“ I can well believe it, *morbleu !* ” said the monk. “ You have long since ceased to blush, old rake.”

“ Oh ! ” said Chicot. “ I, a rake,—I who am abstinence personified, continence in flesh and bone ? I who take part in all the processions, and observe all the fasts ? ”

“ Yes, with your Sardanapalus, your Nebuchadnezzar, your Herod. Interested processions, calculated fasts. Luckily, every one is beginning to know him now, your Henri III. May the devil take him ! ” And Gorenflot in place of the discourse began to sing most lustily the following song :—

“ Le roi, pour avoir de l’argent,
A fait le pauvre et l’indigent
Et l’hypocrite ;
Le grand pardon il a gagné,
Au pain, à l’eau et à jeûné
Comme un ermite ;

Mais Paris qui le connaît bien,
Ne lui voudra plus prêter rien,
A sa requête ;
Car il a déjà tant prêté
Qu'il a de lui dire arrêté :
—Allez en quête."

" Bravo ! " cried Chicot. " Bravo ! " Then he added in a low tone, " Very good ; he is singing, he will talk."

At this moment entered Maître Bonhomet, holding in one hand the omelet and in the other two more bottles of wine.

" Bring it here," cried the monk, with a broad smile that displayed his thirty-two teeth.

" But, my friend," said Chicot, " I thought you had a sermon to preach."

" The sermon is here," said the monk, striking his forehead, which was gradually assuming the same crimson hue as the rest of his face.

" At half-past nine," said Chicot.

" I was lying," said the monk. " *Omnis homo mendax confiteor.*"

" For what hour was it, really ? "

" For ten o'clock."

" For ten o'clock ? I thought the abbey closed at nine o'clock ? "

" Let it close," said Gorenflot, looking at the candle through the liquid ruby contained in his glass. " Let it close, I have the key."

" The key of the abbey ! " cried Chicot. " The key of the abbey,—you ? "

" There in my pocket," said Gorenflot, striking his side. " There ! "

" Impossible ! " said Chicot. " I know the monastic rules. I have been an inmate of three convents. The key of the abbey is never given to a simple monk."

" Here it is," said Gorenflot, leaning back, and jubilantly exhibiting a coin.

"What! money?" said Chicot. "I understand. You bribe the porter to let you come in when you please. Miserable sinner!"

Gorenflot opened his mouth to his ears with the silly, happy smile of a drunken man.

"*Sufficit*," he stammered, as he prepared to restore the money to his pocket.

"Wait, wait!" said Chicot. "What a curious coin!"

"An effigy of the heretic, with a hole through the heart," said Gorenflot.

"Yes, it is a tester of the King of Béarn, and I see a hole."

"A blow with a dagger!" said Gorenflot; "death to the heretic! The one who will kill the heretic is sure of heaven, and I give him my share of paradise."

"Ah, ah!" thought Chicot, "matters are getting plain, but the wretch is not yet drunk enough," and he filled the monk's glass again.

"Yes," said the Gascon, "death to the heretic! *Vive la messe!*"

"*Vive la messe!*" said Gorenflot, emptying his glass, "*vive la messe!*"

"So," said Chicot, who, seeing the tester in his guest's large palm, remembered that the convent porter examined the hand of every monk that came, "so you show this piece of money and—"

"I enter," said Gorenflot.

"Without difficulty?"

"As this wine enters my stomach," and the monk absorbed another dose of the generous liquid.

"*Peste!*" said Chicot; "if the comparison be just, you must enter without touching the sides."

"That is to say," stammered Gorenflot, dead-drunk, "that for Brother Gorenflot the door is opened wide."

"And you make your speech?"

"And I make my speech," said the monk. "This is how the affair is managed. I arrive—do you hear, Chicot, *I arrive*—"

"Of course, I hear. I am all attention."

"I arrive as I said. The assembly is numerous and select. There are barons, there are counts, there are dukes."

"And even princes."

"And even princes," repeated the monk ; "you have said it,—princes, only that. I humbly enter among the faithful of the Union."

"The faithful of the Union," repeated Chicot, in turn. "What is that fidelity ?"

"I enter among the faithful of the Union. Brother Gorenflot is called, and I come forward."

At these words, the monk stood up.

"That is right," said Chicot. "Advance !"

"And I advance," continued Gorenflot, trying to suit his action to the word ; but scarcely had he taken a step, when he fell, rolling on the floor.

"Bravo !" cried the Gascon, raising him up, and setting him on a chair ; "you advance, you bow to the audience, and you say—"

"No, I don't say ; the friends say."

"Well, what do the friends say ?"

"The friends say ; Brother Gorenflot, your speech. What a fine name for a Leaguer, eh ?" and the monk repeated his name with tender inflections in his voice.

"A fine name for a Leaguer," said Chicot. "What truth will come out of this wine-sop."

"Then I begin." The monk arose, closing his eyes because he was dazed, and leaning against the wall because he was unable to stand alone.

"You begin," said Chicot, holding him up against the wall, as the clown does the harlequin.

"I begin : 'Brethren, it is a great day for the faith ; brethren, it is a very great day for the faith ; brethren, it is an extraordinary great day for the faith.'"

After this superlative, Chicot saw he could draw nothing more from the monk, so he let him go. Gorenflot, who had kept his equilibrium only thanks to the support given him by Chicot, so soon as this support failed him, slipped along the wall and his feet struck

the table, a few empty bottles being upset by the shock.

"Amen," said Chicot.

Almost at the same instant thundering snores shook the windows of the narrow room.

"Good!" said Chicot; "the capon's legs are producing their effect. Our friend will sleep for twelve hours and I may undress him without any fear." Then judging that he had no time to lose, Chicot immediately untied the monk's robe, took out each arm, turned Gorenflo around as though he had been a bag of nuts, rolled him up in the table-cloth, covered his head with a napkin and hiding the monk's robe under his cloak, he passed into the kitchen.

"Maître Bonhomet," he said, as he handed the innkeeper a rose noble, "this is for our supper and for my horse, which I recommend to your care; and above all do not wake up that worthy Brother Gorenflo, who is sleeping like one of the elect of heaven."

"Very good," said the innkeeper, satisfied with these three things; "have no uneasiness, Monsieur Chicot."

After this assurance, Chicot ran lightly out, and keen sighted as a fox, reached the corner of the Rue Saint-Étienne, where having carefully placed the King of Béarn's tester in his right hand, he put on the monk's robe, and at a quarter before ten presented himself with a beating heart at the wicket of the Abbey Sainte-Genevieve.

CHAPTER XIX.

HOW CHICOT FOUND OUT THAT IT WAS EASIER TO ENTER THE ABBEY THAN TO COME OUT.

CHICOT, in putting on the monk's robe, had taken an important precaution,—that of increasing the breadth of his shoulders by a skilful arrangement of his cloak and other garments, rendered useless by the robe. His bear-

was of the same color as Gorenflot's, though one was born in the banks of the Garonne, and the other on the banks of the Seine; and he had so often amused himself in mimicking his friend's voice, that he could now imitate to perfection. Now, every one knows that the beard and voice are the only things that come out from the depths of a monk's cowl.

The door was about to close when Chicot appeared, and the porter only awaited a few belated ones. The Gascon exhibited his coin, and was admitted without opposition. Two monks preceded him; he followed them, and entered the convent chapel, whither he had often accompanied the king, who had always granted a special protection to the Sainte-Genevieve Abbey.

This chapel was of romanesque architecture, built in the eleventh century, and like all the chapels of that period, the chancel covered a crypt or lower church. The result of this arrangement was, that the chancel was raised eight or ten feet above the nave, and was reached by two side stairways, while an iron door placed between these led from the nave to the crypt, into which you descended by a staircase having the same number of steps as those leading to the chancel.

In this chancel, which overlooked the whole church, on the side of the altar surmounted by a painting of Saint Genevieve by Rosso, were the statues of Clovis and Clotilda. Three lamps only lit up the chapel,—one suspended from the middle of the chancel, the other two hanging at equal distances in the nave. This dim light gave a greater solemnity to the church, which seemed doubled in size because the imagination could extend the limits in the shadow.

Chicot was obliged to accustom his eyes to the darkness, and amused himself by counting the monks. There were one hundred and twenty in the nave, and twelve in the chancel,—in all, one hundred and thirty-two. The twelve monks of the chancel were placed in a line before the altar, and seemed to defend the tabernacle like a row of sentinels.

Chicot saw with pleasure that he was not the last to join those whom Gorenflot called the brothers of the Union. Behind him came three more monks, clad in ample gray robes, and these last placed themselves before the line of sentinels. A little monk whom Chicot had not yet noticed,—doubtless some lad belonging to the choir,—walked around the chapel to see that each one was in his place ; then, having finished the inspection, he spoke to one of the three monks who had come last, and who were in the middle.

“ We are one hundred and thirty-six ; it is the chosen number.”

Then the hundred and twenty monks kneeling in the nave, rose, placed themselves on chairs, or in stalls, and a great noise of bars and bolts soon announced that the massive doors were closed. Brave as he was, it was not without a certain beating of the heart that Chicot listened to the grating of the locks. To give himself time to recover, he seated himself in the shadow of the pulpit, and his eyes rested on the three monks who seemed to be the principal members of this assembly. They had been given armchairs, and there they sat, like three judges. Behind them stood the twelve monks of the chancel. When the noise made by the closing of the doors had ceased, and the assistants were all settled, a little bell sounded three times. This was no doubt the signal for silence. And after the third ring, every noise ceased.

“ Brother Monsoreau,” said the same monk who had already spoken, “ what news do you bring to the Union from the province of Anjou ? ”

Two things made Chicot start,—the first was the speaker’s strongly accented voice, which seemed better suited to come from a helmet than from a monk’s cowl, the second was that name of Brother Monsoreau, but recently known at court, where his appearance had created a certain sensation.

A tall monk, whose robe hung in angular folds, crossed the church with a firm, bold step and mounted the pulpit. Chicot tried to see his face, but found it impossible.

" Well, if I cannot see the faces of the others, they at least cannot see mine," thought Chicot.

" Brethren," said a voice which Chicot recognized at once as belonging to the master of the hounds, " the news from Anjou is not satisfactory,—not that we lack sympathy, but we lack representatives. The propagation of the Union had been intrusted to the Baron de Méridor ; but he, in despair at the recent death of his daughter, has neglected the affairs of the Holy League, and until he is somewhat consoled of his loss, we cannot count on him. As for me, I bring three new adherents to the association ; and according to the regulation, I have placed the applications in the alms-box of the convent. The council will judge if these three brothers, for whom I can answer as for myself, are worthy of being admitted to the Holy Union."

A murmur of approbation rose from the assembled monks, and Brother Monsoreau had reached his seat before it was quite extinguished.

" Brother la Hurière ! " cried the same monk, who seemed to call the faithful according to his own caprice, " tell us what you have done in the city of Paris."

A man with his hood raised now appeared in the pulpit left vacant by M. de Monsoreau.

" Brethren," he said, " you all know that I am devoted to the Catholic faith, and that I have given proofs of this devotion on the great day of its triumph. Yes, brethren, I glory in saying that even at that period I was a faithful servant of our great Henri de Guise ; and it was from M. le Besme himself,—peace to his soul !—that I received the orders he deigned to give me. So devoted was I that I wished to kill the guests in my own house. Now, this devotion to the holy cause obtained for me the appointment of district police officer, and I make bold to say it is most fortunate for the Church. I have been able to note all the heretics of the vicinity of Saint-Germain-l'Auxerrois, where I still keep in the Rue de l'Arbre-Sec, L'Hôtel de la Belle Étoile, at your service ; and having noted them, I can point them out to our friends. Now, I no

longer thirst as I did for the blood of the Huguenots, but I do not delude myself as to the real object of the Holy Union we are now forming."

"Let us listen," said Chicot to himself. "This La Hurière was, if I remember rightly, a famous slayer of heretics; and he must know a great deal about the League, if they measure confidence by merit."

"Speak! speak!" cried several voices.

La Hurière, who found an opportunity to display his oratorical talents, which he but seldom developed, though they were innate in him, collected himself for a moment and then resumed:—

"If I am not mistaken, brethren, the extinction of individual heresies is not our only aim. All good Frenchmen must be certain of never finding any heretics among the princes likely to govern them. Now, brethren, what is our situation? Francis II., who promised to be zealous, died without children. Charles IX., who was zealous, died without children. King Henri III., whose beliefs and actions I am not called upon to judge, will probably die without children. There remains the Duc d'Anjou, who is not only without children, but also seems lukewarm towards the Holy League."

The orator was here interrupted by several voices among which was that of the master of the hounds.

"Why do you say lukewarm, and why do you bring that accusation against the prince?"

"I say lukewarm, because he has not yet given his adhesion to the League, though the illustrious brother who has interrupted me promised it positively in his name."

"Who tells you he has not given it?" said the voice. "Are there not new adhesions? It seems to me you have no right to suspect any one until the report is made."

"That is true," said La Hurière; "I shall therefore wait. But after the Duc d'Anjou, who is mortal, and has no children,—and you know that they all die young in his family,—to whom will the crown go? To the mos-

erocious Huguenot in the land,—to a renegade, a Nebuchadnezzar."

Instead of murmurs, frantic applause now interrupted La Hurière.

" To Henri de Béarn, against whom this association is chiefly directed ; to Henri de Béarn, who is often believed to be at Tarbes or Pau, occupied with his love affairs, whereas he is in Paris."

" In Paris ? " cried several voices,—" in Paris ? impossible ! "

" He has been here," said La Hurière. " He was here in the night that Madame de Sauves was assassinated. He may be here at this moment."

" Death to the Béarnais ! " cried several voices.

" Yes, death to him ! " cried La Hurière. " And if he come to lodge at the Belle Étoile, I can answer for him. But he will not come ; a fox is never caught twice in the same hole. He will lodge with some friend,—for he has friends, the heretic ! Well, the number of these friends must be diminished or made known. Our union is holy ; our league is loyal, consecrated, blessed, encouraged by our holy father the Pope, Gregory XIII. Therefore, I demand that it be no longer kept secret, and that lists should be given to the district police officers, who will go into the houses and invite the good citizens to sign. Those who will sign will be our friends ; those who refuse to sign will be our enemies ; and should there be occasion for a new Saint-Bartholomew, which seems more and more necessary,—well, we will do as we did at the first : we will spare God the trouble of separating the good from the evil."

This conclusion was received with thunders of applause. When they had quieted, with that slow tumult which roves that the acclamations are only interrupted, the rave voice of the monk who had already spoken several times was heard again, saying,—

" The proposition of Brother la Hurière, whom the Holy Union thanks for his zeal, will be taken into consideration and discussed before the Superior Council."

The applause increased. La Hurière bowed several times to thank the assembly ; and coming down from the pulpit, returned to his place, bending beneath the weight of his triumph.

“ Ah, ah ! ” said Chicot to himself, “ I am beginning to see through all this. In the matter of Catholic faith they have less confidence in my son Henri than in Charles IX. and MM. de Guise. This is probable, since Mayenne is mixed up in it. MM. de Guise wish to form in the State a nice little party, of which they will be the masters. Now the great Henri, who is a general, will have the armies the fat Mayenne will have the *bourgeoisie* ; the illustrious cardinal will have the Church ; and one fine morning my son Henri will perceive that he has nothing left but his chaplet of death’s heads, which he will be politely invited to carry into some monastery. Very well reasoned ; but —there remains the Duc d’Anjou. The devil ! what will they do with the Duc d’Anjou ? ”

“ Brother Gorenflot ! ” said the monk, who had already called the master of the hounds and La Hurière.

Whether he was so busy with the thoughts we have just transcribed, or whether he was not yet accustomed to the name he had taken with the monk’s robe, at all events Chicot did not answer.

“ Brother Gorenflot ! ” cried the little monk, in a voice so clear and shrill that Chicot started.

“ Oh, oh ! ” he murmured ; “ one would think it was a woman’s voice calling Gorenflot. In this honorable assembly do sexes mingle as well as classes ? ”

“ Brother Gorenflot ! ” repeated the same feminine voice, “ are you not here ? ”

“ Eh, ” said Chicot to himself, “ I am Brother Gorenflot ! Come. ” Then, aloud, “ Yes, yes, ” he added talking through his nose, “ here I am. I was plunged in a deep meditation, and was reflecting on Brother la Hurière’s speech, and did not hear my name called. ”

A few murmurs of retrospective approbation in favor of La Hurière, whose words were still ringing in all hearts were heard, and gave Chicot time to prepare himself.

Chicot, we might say, could have remained silent, as none raised their hoods ; but it must be remembered that the members present had been counted. An examination of the faces would have followed, caused by the absence of a man supposed to be present. The fraud would then be discovered, and Chicot's position become most perilous. He did not, therefore, hesitate one instant, but rose, and bending his back as much as possible, he mounted to the pulpit, pulling his hood over his face.

" Brethren," he said, in a voice which was a perfect imitation of the monk's, " I am the collector for the convent, and as such, you know, I have the privilege of entering all houses. I therefore make use of this privilege for the Lord's service. Brethren," he continued, remembering Gorenflot's beginning, so suddenly interrupted by sleep, which, in consequence of the liquid absorbed, still held the real Gorenflot in subjection,—" brethren, this day which sees us all united is a great one for religion. Let us be frank, since we are in the house of God.

" What is the kingdom of France ? A body. Saint Augustine has said, ' Omnis civitas corpus est.' Every city is a body. What is the first requisite of a body ? Good health. How is the health preserved ? By prudently bleeding it when there is excess of blood. Now, it is evident that the enemies of our religion are too strong, whence we fear them. We must, therefore, bleed once more that great body called society. This is said to me every day by the faithful whose eggs, hams, and money I bring to the convent."

This first part of Chicot's speech produced a great impression. He allowed the murmur of approval to die away, and resumed :

" Some may, perhaps, object that the Church abhors blood. *Ecclesia abhorret a sanguine*," he continued ; " but note this, my dear brethren : the theologian does not say what blood the Church abhors, and I would wager an egg against an ox that it is not the blood of heretics ; in fact, *cons malus corruptorum sanguis, hereticorum autem pessimus* ! And then another argument ; I said the Church.

But we are not the Church alone. Brother Monsoreau who spoke so eloquently just now, has, I am very sure, his huntsman's knife in his belt. Brother la Hurière manages the spit with facility. *Veru agreste, lethiferum tamen instrumentum.* I, myself, who speak to you,—I Jacques Népomucène Gorenflot,—I have shouldered the musket in Champagne, and burned Huguenots at prayer-meeting. That would have been a sufficient honor for me, and I would have been sure of paradise. I thought so at least, when a scruple suddenly arose in my conscience. Before being burned, the Huguenot women had been offered violence. It seems, this ruined the great deed,—at least, so my director told me. Therefore I hastened to embrace religion to efface the stain left by the heretic; and from that moment I registered a vow of abstinence, and resolved to frequent only good Catholics."

This second part of the discourse met with no less success than the first, and each one had an opportunity of admiring the means adopted by God to bring about Brother Gorenflot's conversion; therefore, some applause mingled with this murmur of approbation. Chico modestly bowed, and continued:—

" We must now speak of the chiefs we have chosen and it seems to me, poor monk though I am, that something might be said about them. Surely, it is both well and prudent to come at night under a monk's robe to hear Brother Gorenflot preach; but it seems to me that the duties of great chiefs do not stop there. So much prudence makes those cursed Huguenots laugh, and they are no mean adversaries when it comes to blows. Let us play a part more worthy of the brave men we are, or rather, wish to appear. What do we wish? The extinction of heresy. Well, we may proclaim it over the housetops, I think. Why can we not march, in holy procession, through the streets of Paris, displaying our good order and good partisans?—not like sneak thieves, who look at every street corner to see if the watch is coming. But who will be the man to set the example, you say?"

Well, it is I, Jacques Népomucène Gorenflot,—I, unworthy brother of the order of Sainte-Genevieve, poor and humble collector for the convent. It is I, who, with a cuirass on my back, and a helmet on my head, will march, if need be, at the head of all good Catholics who will follow me. This I will do, were it only to bring a blush to the chiefs, who, while defending the Church, hide as though they were defending some unworthy quarrel."

This conclusion of Chicot's speech corresponded with the sentiments of many members of the League, who saw no necessity to attain their ends by any other means than those adopted six years before on St. Bartholomew's Day, and who were in despair over the lack of energy displayed by their chiefs. All hearts were stirred, and, save the three monks, who remained silent, the assembly shouted unanimously, "*Vive la messe ! Noël* to the brave Brother Gorenflot ! The procession ! the procession !"

The enthusiasm was all the greater as it was the first time that the worthy brother had showed himself in this light. Up to this time, his most intimate friends had numbered him among the zealous ones, no doubt, but the feeling of self-preservation held him within the limits of prudence. However, such was no longer the case ; and from the dim shadow in which he was placed, Brother Gorenflot suddenly rushed in battle array into the bright light of the arena. This was a great surprise, and many, in their admiration, which was all the greater because it was unexpected, put Gorenflot, who had preached the first procession, on a level with Peter the Hermit, who had preached the first crusade.

Luckily or unluckily for the one who had produced this enthusiasm, it was not the plan of the chiefs to let it continue. One of the three silent monks whispered something to the little monk, and the child's silvery tones immediately rang out under the arches, calling out three mes :—

" Brethren, it is the hour for retreat ; the meeting is over."

The monks tumultuously arose, and though determined to insist at the next meeting for the procession proposed by Brother Gorenfot, they slowly wended their way to the door. A great many had gone near the pulpit to congratulate the brother as he descended from the rostrum where he had met with such great success. But Chicot reflected that his voice, from which he could never wholly eradicate the Gascon accent, might be recognized if heard close by, and that his body, which was six or eight inches taller than Gorenfot's, who had grown in the minds of his hearers, but principally morally, might excite some surprise; Chicot had, therefore, thrown himself on his knees, and, like Samuel, seemed buried in a *tête-à-tête* conversation with God.

His ecstasy was respected, and each one went toward the door in a state of agitation which greatly amused Chicot, who had arranged his hood in a way that allowed him to see all.

However, Chicot had missed his chief object. It was the sight of the Duc de Mayenne which had induced him to leave King Henri III. without bidding him adieu. It was the sight of Nicolas David which made him return to Paris. Chicot had taken a double vow of vengeance but he was not of sufficiently lofty degree to attack the prince of the house of Lorraine, or do it with impunity and he must patiently bide his time. Such, however, was not the case with Nicolas David, who was only a simple Norman lawyer, but a very shrewd one, and who before being a lawyer, had been a soldier, and fencing master while he was a soldier. Now, without being a fencing-master, Chicot pretended to handle the sword fairly well. The great question, therefore, consisted in finding his enemy; and having once found him, Chicot, like the knights of old, would put his life under the protection of his good sword and good cause.

Chicot examined these monks, as they went out one by one, and tried to recognize under these robes and cowls the long meagre figure of Maître Nicolas. Suddenly, I observed that each monk had to go through the same

process as on entering, and was only allowed to pass out after having shown some sign to the porter. Chicot first thought he was mistaken, and remained in doubt for the space of a second ; but this doubt soon became a certainty, which sent cold chills to the roots of his hair.

Gorenflot had showed the sign by which he could enter, but had omitted to show him the one by which he could leave.

CHAPTER XX.

HOW CHICOT, FORCED TO REMAIN IN THE CHURCH OF THE ABBEY, SAW AND HEARD THINGS IT WAS VERY DANGEROUS TO SEE AND HEAR.

HICOT hastened to descend from his pulpit and mingle with the last monks, so as to discover, if possible, the sign by which they gained the street, and to procure that sign he still had time to do so. Having joined the last ones and peeped over their shoulders, Chicot saw that each one was provided with a farthing cut in the shape of a star. Our Gascon had a good many farthings in his pocket, but unfortunately none were of that particular shape, which was all the more strange, because the coin could no longer be used after this mutilation.

Chicot grasped the situation at a glance. Having once reached the door, if he could not produce his star-shaped farthing he would be discovered as a fraud, and the examination would not end there. Master Chicot the king's jester, who had many privileges at the Louvre and in other royal residences, had none in the Abbey of Sainte-Genevieve, particularly under these circumstances, and would be caught in a trap. He therefore sought the friendly shadow of a pillar, and hid in the corner of a confessional box, standing near by.

" And then," said Chicot to himself, " in injuring myself, I injure the cause of my imbecile of a king, whom I am foolish enough to love, though I always abuse him. It

would no doubt be better to return to the Corn d'Abondance and join Gorenflot, but we cannot do impossible." While speaking to himself,—that is, to the person most interested in not repeating a word that he said,—Chicot hid as well as he could between his confessional and the mouldings of his pillar.

He then heard the choir-boy call out,—

" Is every one out ? The doors will be closed."

No one answered. Chicot put out his head, and saw that the chapel was empty with the exception of the three monks, more hooded than ever, who remained on the chairs placed for them in the centre of the chancel.

" Good," said Chicot ; " provided they do not close the windows, it is all I ask."

" Let us inspect," said the choir-boy to the porter.

" *Ventre de biche !*" said Chicot, " here is a little monk I shall long remember."

The porter lit a taper and, accompanied by the choir-boy, began to go round the church. There was not a moment to lose. The porter with his taper would pass within four steps of Chicot, who would surely be discovered.

Chicot turned round the pillar, standing in the shadow as the shadow turned, and opening the door of the confessional which was unlocked, he slipped in and drew the door after him as he took his seat. The porter and the little monk passed within four steps of him, and through the carved grating Chicot saw on his dress the reflection of the taper that lighted them.

" The devil ! " said Chicot to himself, " this porter, this little monk, and these three hooded individuals cannot eternally remain in the church ; after they go, I shall pile up the chairs on the benches,—Ossa on Pelion as M. Ronsard would say,—and I shall get out through the window."

" Ah, yes, through the window," resumed Chicot, answering himself. " But once out through the window I shall be in the courtyard ; and the courtyard is not the street. I think it will be better to spend the night in

confessional. Gorenflot's robe is warm ; it will be a better night than the one I would have spent elsewhere, and it will count for my salvation."

"Put out the lights," said the choir-boy. "Let them see from without that the council is really over."

The porter, with the help of an immense extinguisher, put out at once the two lamps in the nave, which was immediately plunged in a funereal obscurity ; then that of the chancel. The church was now lit only by the pale rays of a winter moon, which could scarcely penetrate through the stained glass of the windows. Then, after the lights, the sounds died away. The bell tolled twelve times.

"*Ventre de biche !*" said Chicot, "in a church at midnight. If he were in my place, my son Henriet would have a good fright. Luckily, we are of a less timid nature. Come, Chicot, my friend, good-night ; sleep well."

Having addressed this wish to himself, Chicot arranged himself as comfortably as he could in his confessional, drew the little inside bolt, and closed his eyes. Ten minutes had now elapsed since his eyes were closed, and his mind, yielding to the first influence of sleep, saw floating vaguely through the twilight of his thoughts a number of shadowy figures, when a loud blow, struck on copper bell, vibrated through the church, and gradually died away.

"Oh," said Chicot, opening his eyes and listening, "what does this mean ?"

At the same time the chancel lamp gave forth a blueish light, and its rays fell upon the three monks still seated motionless in the same place.

Chicot was not exempt from a certain superstitious ear. Brave as he was, our Gascon belonged to his century, which was that of fantastic traditions and terrible legends. He quietly made the sign of the cross, and murmured in a low tone :—

"*Vade retro, Satanás !*"

But as the light did not die out at the holy sign of our

redemption, which would surely have happened if it had been infernal light, as the three monks remained in the same place notwithstanding the *vade retro*, the Gascon began to think he had to deal with real lights, and men of flesh and bone, if not real monks.

Chicot nevertheless shook himself, feeling the chill of the suddenly awakened man, combined with the thrill of fright. At this moment one of the flagstones of the chancel slowly rose and stood straight up. A gray hood appeared through the narrow opening, then the entire figure of a monk, who stepped out, while the stone quietly dropped back into its place.

At this sight, Chicot forgot the exorcising formula he had just uttered, and in the efficacy of which he had full confidence. His hair stood on end, and he imagined for a moment that all the priors, abbots, and deacons of Sainte-Genevieve, from Optaf, who died in 533, to Pierre Boudin, predecessor of the actual superior, were coming to life in their graves, placed in the crypt where the ashes of Saint Genevieve had formerly lain, and that they would raise with their bony skulls the stones of the chancel according to the example given them. But his doubts were not of long duration.

“ Brother Monsoreau,” said one of the three seated monks, to the one who had so strangely appeared, “ has the person we expect arrived ? ”

“ Yes, monseigneur,” replied the one thus addressed ; “ the person is waiting here.”

“ Open the door, that he may enter.”

“ Good ! ” said Chicot ; “ it appears the comedy has two acts, and I have only seen the first. Two acts,—that is a bad number.” Though jesting with himself, Chicot was still a prey to certain thrills, which seemed to make thousands of needles rise up from the wooden stall on which he was seated.

However, Brother Monsoreau descended the stairs which went from the chancel to the nave, and opened the bronze door leading into the crypt. At the same moment the middle monk threw back his hood and showed the

great scar,—noble sign,—by which the Parisians so eagerly recognized the man who was already considered the hero of the Catholics before he became their martyr.

“ The great Henri de Guise in person, whom his very imbecile Majesty believes occupied at the siege of La Charité. Ah, I understand now ! ” cried Chicot. “ The one on the right, who blessed the assembly, is the Cardinal of Lorraine, while the one on the left, who spoke to that myrmidon of an altar-boy, is Monseigneur de Mayenne, my friend. But in all this, where is Maître Nicolas David ? ”

In fact, as if to immediately confirm Chicot’s suppositions, the monks on the right and left threw back their hoods, and exposed to view the intelligent head, broad brow, and piercing eye of the famous cardinal, and the infinitely less noble face of the Duc de Mayenne.

“ Ah, I recognize you ! A trinity not holy, but most visible,” said Chicot. “ Now let us see what you will do : I am all eyes. Let us hear what you will say : I am all attention.”

At that very moment M. de Monsoreau had reached the iron door of the crypt, which opened before him.

“ Did you think he would come ? ” said Le Balafré to his brother the cardinal.

“ I not only thought so,” replied the latter, “ but I was so sure that I have under my cloak all that is requisite to replace the holy phial.”

Chicot, placed sufficiently near the trinity, as he called them, to see and hear everything, perceived by the dim light of the chancel lamp a silver-gilt box, richly chased.

“ Ah,” said Chicot, “ it seems they are about to crown some one, and I had always longed to see a coronation. I am in luck.”

During this soliloquy, about twenty monks, their heads buried in immense hoods, passed through the door leading from the crypt, and took their places in the nave. One alone, conducted by M. de Monsoreau, mounted the chancel steps, and stationed himself at the right of MM. de Guise, on one of the chancel stalls. The altar-boy, who had

reappeared, respectfully took the orders of the right-hand monk and disappeared. The Duc de Guise glanced round at this assembly, which was only one sixth as numerous as the first one, and probably very select, and having convinced himself that his words were impatiently expected,--

“ Friends,” said he, “ time is precious ; I shall therefore go straight to the point. You heard just now (for I presume you were present at the first meeting), you heard just now, in the reports of some members of the Catholic League, the complaints of those who tax with coldness, and even malevolence, one of the principal persons among us,—the prince nearest the throne. The time has now come to render to this prince the respect and justice we owe him. You will hear him ; and you, who have at heart the fulfilling of the first object of the League, will judge if your chiefs deserve the reproach of coldness and apathy made just now by one of our brothers,—the monk Gorenfot, whom we did not think it advisable to admit into our secret.”

At this name, pronounced by the Duc de Guise in a tone which showed his evil intentions towards the warlike monk, Chicot, in his confessional, gave way to a fit of hilariously which, though silent, was none the less out of place, considering the exalted rank of the great personages who were the cause of it.

“ Brethren,” continued the duke, “ the prince, whose alliance had been promised us, and whose simple assent we hardly dared hope for,—brethren, the prince is here.”

Every glance was turned towards the monk placed on the right of the three Lorraine princes, and standing on the steps of his stall.

“ Monseigneur,” said the Duc de Guise, addressing the one who was for the time being the object of general attention, “ the will of God appears visible to me. Since you have consented to join us, it shows that what we do is well done. Now, will your Highness grant us the prayer we ask ? We beg you to lower your hood, that the faithful may see with their own eyes that you keep the promise

we made in your name,—a promise so flattering that they hardly dared to believe it."

The mysterious personage whom Henri de Guise had thus addressed put his hand to his hood, which he threw back on his shoulders ; and Chicot, who expected to see some Lorraine prince of whom he had not yet heard, beheld with surprise the head of the Duc d'Anjou, so pale that in the sepulchral light of the lamp it looked like that of a marble statue.

" Oh, oh," said Chicot, " our brother of Anjou ! Will he not weary of playing for the crown with the heads of others ? "

" Long live Monseigneur le Duc d'Anjou ! " cried all the assembly.

François grew even paler than before.

" Fear nothing, monseigneur," said Henri de Guise ; " this chapel has no echo, and the doors are well closed."

" Good precaution," said Chicot to himself.

" Brethren," said the Comte de Monsoreau, " his Highness wishes to address a few words to the assembly."

" Yes, yes ! " cried all, unanimously. " Let him speak ; we are listening."

The Lorraine princes turned to the Duc d'Anjou and bowed. The duke leaned on the arms of his stall and seemed about to fall.

" Gentlemen," he said, in a voice so trembling that his first words could scarcely be heard,— " gentlemen, I believe that God, who often appears insensible and deaf to the things of this world, keeps, on the contrary, his piercing eyes constantly fixed on us, and remains thus apparently silent and indifferent only to remedy, by some great blow, the disorders caused by the foolish ambitions of men."

The beginning of the duke's speech was, like his character, decidedly obscure ; therefore, before showing blame or approval, each one waited for a little more light to be thrown on his Highness's thoughts. The duke now continued, in a firmer voice :—

" I, too, have cast a glance upon the world ; and being

unable to see it all at one look, I fixed my eyes upon France. What did I see throughout the kingdom ? The holy religion of Christ shaken to its very foundations, the true servants of God scattered and proscribed. Then I sounded the depths of the abyss, open twenty years by the heresies which sap all beliefs, under pretext of reaching God more surely, and my soul, like that of the prophet, has been full of grief."

A murmur of approval was heard. The duke had expressed his sympathy for the sufferings of the Church. It was almost a declaration of war to those who made the Church suffer.

" In the midst of this profound affliction," continued the prince, " I heard that several noble and pious gentlemen, devoted to the faith of their ancestors, were trying to consolidate the shaken altars. I looked around me, and I thought I was present at the last judgment, and that God had separated into two bodies the damned and the elect. I shrank in horror from the former, and turned to the elect, into whose arms I rushed. Brethren, I am here."

" Amen," said Chicot, in a low voice, but this was a useless precaution. He might have answered aloud, and his voice would not have been heard in the midst of the applause and acclamations that filled the church. The three Lorraine princes who had given the signal for this manifestation allowed it to die away ; then the cardinal, who stood nearest the duke, approached him and said,—

" You have come among us of your own free will ? "

" Of my own free will, monsieur."

" Who instructed you in the holy mystery ? "

" My friend, M. le Comte de Monsoreau,—a man zealous for religion."

" Now," said the Duc de Guise,—" now that your Highness is one of us, have the kindness, monseigneur, to tell us what you intend to do for the good of the League."

" I intend to serve the Catholic, apostolic, and Roman religion in all its demands," replied the neophyte.

" *Ventre de biche !*" said Chicot ; " upon my soul,

these people are great fools to hide themselves in order to say these things. Why do they not simply propose this to King Henri III., my illustrious master ? All this would suit him admirably. Processions, macerations, extirpations of heresies, as in Rome ; fagots and *auto-dafés*, as in Flanders and Spain,—why, this is the only way to make that good prince have children ! *Corbœuf !* I am tempted to leave my confessional and present myself in turn, this dear Duc d'Anjou has stirred my heart so deeply. Continue, worthy brother of his Majesty ; noble imbecile, continue ! ” And the duke, as if sensible of the encouragement, did continue.

“ But,” he said, “ the interests of religion are not the only object that gentlemen should have in view. As for me, I had another.”

“ Oh ! ” said Chicot. “ I, too, am a gentleman, so it interests me. Speak on, D'Anjou, speak on ! ”

“ Monseigneur, we are listening most attentively to your Highness,” said the Cardinal de Guise.

“ And our hearts throb with hope as we listen,” said M. de Mayenne.

“ I shall, therefore, explain myself,” said the Duc d'Anjou, peering into the dark recesses of the chapel, to ascertain if his words would be heard by any but those worthy of listening to them. M. de Monsoreau understood the prince's fears, and reassured him by a most significant smile and glance.

“ Now, when a gentleman has thought of what he owes to God,” continued the Duc d'Anjou, involuntarily lowering his voice, “ he thinks of his— ”

“ *Parbleu !* of his king,” whispered Chicot. “ That is well known.”

“ Of his country,” said the Duc d'Anjou. “ And he asks himself if it really enjoys all the honor and all the prosperity which should be its share ; for a good gentleman draws his advantages first from God, and then from his country.”

The assembly applauded vigorously.

“ Eh ! ” said Chicot, “ but where is the king in all this ? ”

No one speaks of this poor monarch,—and I who believe they always said what is written on the pyramid of Juvisy ‘ God, the king, and the ladies ! ! ’

“ I ask myself,” pursued the Duc d’Anjou, whose high cheek-bones were gradually reddening under the effect of feverish excitement,—“ I ask myself if my country enjoys the peace and happiness deserved by this beautiful land of France, and I see with grief that it does not. Indeed, brethren, the State is torn asunder by different wills and factions, each as powerful as the other, while the supreme head, weak, and forgetful of the fact that he should rule over everything for the good of the people, only remembers this royal principle at capricious intervals, and in such a manner that its rare acts of energy do not promote the public good. We must attribute this misfortune to the fatal destiny of France or to the wilful blindness of its chief. But, though we may be in ignorance of the true cause, or only suspect it, the evil is none the less real ; and I accuse certain false friends of the king, rather than the king himself, of the crimes committed by France against religion. Therefore, gentlemen, as a good servant of the church, and of the throne, I unite with those who seek, by every means, the extinction of heresy, and the ruin of perfidious counsellors. This is what I mean to do for the League by joining with you.”

“ Oh, oh ! ” murmured Chicot, in amazement. “ He is showing himself in his true colors ; and he is not a ass, as I thought at first, but a fox.”

This discourse of the Duc d’Anjou’s, which may have appeared a little long to our readers, after a lapse of three centuries, had so greatly interested the spectators that the greater number had drawn nearer the prince, not to lose a syllable of what he said. As the sense of the words grew plainer, his voice became lower. The sight was a curious one. The assistants, who numbered twenty-five or thirty, with their hoods thrown back, uncovering faces on which were stamped intelligence, boldness, and curiosity, were grouped together under the only lamp that lit up this scene. Great shadows filled the other

portions of the building, and had nothing in common with the scene enacted on a single point.

In the midst of the group shone the pale face of the Duc d'Anjou, with his deep, sunken eyes, and his ghastly smile, which resembled the grin of a skull.

"Monseigneur," said the Duc de Guise, "in thanking your Highness for the words you have just uttered, I will say that you are surrounded by men devoted, not only to the principles you profess, but to the person of your Royal Highness; and if you have any doubts on this subject, the conclusion of this meeting should convince you."

The Duc d'Anjou bowed, and as he raised his head, he drew an uneasy glance upon the assembly.

"Oh," murmured Chicot, "if I am not mistaken, all that has taken place is but the preface to a more important action yet to come."

"Monseigneur," said the cardinal, who had observed the prince's glance, "if your Highness felt any fear, the names of those here present should reassure you. Here is M. le Gouverneur d'Aunis, M. d'Entragues the younger, I. de Ribeirac, and M. de Livarot, gentlemen whom your Highness doubtless knows, and who are as brave as they are loyal. Here are, also, M. de Castillon, M. le Baron de Lusignan, MM. Crucé and Leclerc, all firm supporters of our Highness, and ready to march under your guidance to the emancipation of religion and the throne. We shall gratefully receive the orders you will please to give us."

The Duc d'Anjou could not repress a movement of pride. These proud Guises, whom no one could bend, spoke of obeying.

The Duc de Mayenne resumed:—

"You are, by your birth and your wisdom, the natural head of the Holy League, monseigneur; and we must learn from you what should be our conduct with reference to those false friends of the king whom you mentioned just now."

"Nothing is more simple," replied the prince, with that sort of feverish excitement which in weak natures takes

the place of courage. "When parasitic or poisonous plants grow in a field, which would otherwise produce a rich harvest, we uproot them. The king is surrounded not by friends but by courtiers who ruin him, and cause a perpetual scandal throughout France and Christendom."

"That is true," said the Duc de Guise, in a gloomy tone.

"Besides," continued the cardinal, "these courtiers prevent us, who are his Majesty's true friends, from approaching him as our birth and position would entitle us to do."

"Let us leave the care of serving God to the common leaguers,—to those of the first League," suddenly said the Duc de Mayenne. "In serving God, they will serve those who speak to them of God. We attend to our business. Certain men are in our way; they defy us, insult us, and continually fail in their respect to the prince whom we honor the most, and who is our chief."

A slight flush mounted to the Duc d'Anjou's brow.

"Let us destroy," continued the Duc de Mayenne,—"let us destroy to the very last one, that accursed race whom the king is forever enriching at our expense, and let each one of us undertake to remove one of them. There are thirty of us here; let us count them."

"This is wisely thought out," said the Duc d'Anjou, "and you have already done your task, M. de Mayenne."

"What is done, does not count," said the duke.

"Yet, you must leave some to us, monseigneur," said D'Entragues. "I shall take charge of Quélus."

"I, of Maugiron," said Livarot.

"And I, of Schomberg," said Ribeirac.

"Well, well," repeated the duke, "and we have sti[Bussy, my brave Bussy, who will rid us of a few.]

"So will we!" cried all the leaguers.

M. de Monsoreau advanced.

"Ah, ah," said Chicot, who, seeing how things were turning, no longer laughed, "here is the master of the hounds, who comes in for his share of the spoils."

Chicot was mistaken.

" Gentlemen," he said, extending his hand, " I ask for a moment's silence. We are resolute men, and we fear to speak openly to each other. We are intelligent men stopped on the way by silly scruples. Come, gentlemen, a little courage, a little boldness, a little frankness. We are not really concerned about the king's favorites, or about the difficulty we find in approaching his Majesty."

" Indeed ! " said Chicot, opening wide his eyes in the depths of his confessional, and holding his left hand to his ear not to lose a word of what was said. " Indeed ! Make haste ; I am waiting."

" What concerns us, gentlemen," resumed the count, is the impossibility to act. It is the royalty which is given to us, and which is not acceptable to the French nobility ; litanies, despotism, powerlessness, and orgies ; prodigalities for fêtes which are the laughing-stock of all Europe ; parsimoniousness for all that concerns war and its. Such conduct is not weakness nor ignorance, gentlemen ; it is madness."

A death-like silence followed these words of the master of the hounds. The impression was all the deeper that each man was saying to himself what had just been spoken loud ; and each one therefore started as at the echo of his own voice, and was startled to see how entirely he shared the opinion of the orator.

M. de Monsoreau, who felt that this silence was only due to an excess of approbation, continued :—

" Must we live under a mad, inert, and indolent king, at the moment when Spain is lighting its stakes, when Germany is awakening the old heresiarchs sleeping in the loisters, when England with her inflexible policy cuts down heads and thoughts ? All other nations are working gloriously at something. We are asleep. Gentlemen, forgive me for saying it before a great prince who will perhaps blame my temerity, for he has the prejudice of a family,—gentlemen, for the past four years we have not been governed by a king, but by a monk ! "

At these words the explosion, cleverly prepared and for the last hour held in check by the chiefs, burst forth so

violently that no one would have recognized in these fanatics the cold and wise calculators of the preceding scene.

“ Down with the Valois ! ” they cried. “ Down with Brother Henri ! Give us a gentleman prince, a knightly king, a tyrant, if necessary, but not a monk ! ”

“ Gentlemen, gentlemen ! ” hypocritically said the Duc d’Anjou. “ I beg your forgiveness for my brother, who is mistaken, or rather, deceived. Let me hope, gentlemen, that our wise remonstrances, that the efficacious intervention of the power of the League, will bring him back into the right path.”

“ Hiss, serpent, hiss ! ” said Chicot.

“ Monseigneur,” replied the Duc de Guise, “ your Highness has perhaps heard a little too soon the sincere expression of thought of the association. No, this is no longer a league against the Bearnese, a scarecrow for fools, this is no league to sustain the church, which is quite capable of sustaining itself alone. The object, gentlemen, is to draw the nobility of France from the abject position in which it is now placed. Too long have we been restrained by respect for your Highness. The well-known love you bear to your family has forced us too long to dissimulation. Now that all has been revealed to you, monseigneur, your Highness will witness the real assembly of the League, of which this was only the prelude.”

“ What do you mean, Monsieur le Duc ? ” asked the prince, thrilled with emotion and ambition.

“ Monseigneur,” continued the Duc de Guise, “ we have assembled, as M. de Monsoreau has just judiciously observed, not to discuss worn out questions of theory, but to act with vigor. We choose to-day a chief capable of honoring and enriching the nobility of France ; and as it was the custom of the ancient Franks to give a suitable present to the chief they had chosen, let us offer one to the chief we have given ourselves—”

All hearts were beating, but less so, however, than the Duc d’Anjou’s. Yet he remained silent and motionless, and his palor alone betrayed his emotion.

“ Gentlemen,” continued the duke, taking from the stall behind him a rather heavy object, which he raised in his hands,—“ gentlemen, here is the present which, in the name of the whole assembly, I lay at the prince’s feet.”

“ A crown ! ” cried the duke, scarcely able to stand. A crown to me, gentlemen ! ”

“ Long live François III.,” unanimously cried the compact group of gentlemen, who had drawn their words.

“ I—I ! ” murmured the duke, trembling at once with joy and terror ; “ I ! It is impossible ! My brother is still living ; my brother is the anointed of God.”

“ We depose him,” said the duke, “ while waiting for God to sanction, by his death, the election we have just made ; or rather, while waiting until one of his subjects, wearied of this inglorious reign, should anticipate this justice by poison or a dagger.”

“ Gentlemen,” said the duke more feebly,—“ gentlemen ! ”

“ Monseigneur,” now said the cardinal, “ here is our answer to the scruple your Highness has but now so nobly expressed : Henri III. was the anointed of God, but we have deposed him ; he is no longer the elected one of God as you will be, monseigneur. Here is a temple as venerable as that of Rheims, for here have lain the relics of saint Genevieve, patron saint of Paris ; here was buried the body of Clovis, the first Christian king. Well, monseigneur, in this holy temple, before the statue of the true founder of the French monarchy, I, one of the princes of the Church, who hope with just ambition to become some day its head, I tell you this, monseigneur : Here is some holy oil sent by Pope Gregory XIII. to replace the chrism. Appoint your future Archbishop of Rheims, appoint your constable, and in one instant you will be the consecrated king, and your brother Henri will be the usurper, if he does not surrender the throne to you. Child, light the papers on the altar.”

At the same moment the altar-boy, who was evidently expecting this order, came out of the vestry-room with a

lighter in his hand, and within one instant fifty torches were blazing in the chancel.

Then were seen on the altar a mitre glittering with precious stones and a large sword with *fleur-de-lis*. It was the archbishop's mitre and the sword of the constable.

At the same moment there came from the darkness which had not been entirely dispelled by the lighting of the torches, the sound of the organ, and the *Veni Creator* pealed forth.

This little incident, prepared by the three Lorraine princes, and which the Duc d'Anjou himself did not expect, produced a deep impression on those present. The courageous felt their hearts swell within their breasts, and even the weak felt strong.

The Duc d'Anjou raised his head and with a firm hand and step than might have been expected, he walked straight to the altar, took the sword in his right, the mitre in his left hand, and walking to the duke and the cardinal, who expected this double honor, he placed the mitre on the head of the former, and girt the sword on the latter. Unanimous applause greeted this decisive action, all the more unexpected as the prince's irresolute character was well known.

"Gentlemen," said the duke to those present, "give your names to M. de Mayenne, grand master of France. On the day when I shall be king, you will all be knights of the order."

The applause increased, and the spectators came one by one to give their names to M. de Mayenne.

"*Mordieu !*" said Chicot, "what a good opportunity to get the blue ribbon, and to think that I deprive myself of it !"

"Now to the altar, sire," said the Cardinal de Guise.

"M. de Monsoreau, my captain-colonel, MM. de Ribeirac and d'Entragues my captains, M. de Livarot my lieutenant of the guards, take in the chancel the places to which you are entitled by your rank."

Each one of those who had just been appointed took the

lace that would have been assigned to him in the real ceremony of a coronation.

" Gentlemen," said the duke, addressing the rest of the assembly, " you may all ask me a boon, and I shall try to satisfy all."

During that time the cardinal had passed behind the tabernacle and donned the pontifical ornaments. He soon reappeared with the holy oil, which he placed on the altar. He then made a sign to the choir-boy, to bring the book of the Gospels and the cross. The cardinal took them both, laid the cross on the book of the Gospels and extended them to the Duc d'Anjou, who laid his hand upon them.

" In the presence of God," said the duke, " I promise my people to maintain and honor our holy religion, as befits the very Christian king and eldest son of the Church. May God and his holy Gospels stand me in aid ! "

" Amen ! " replied all the spectators.

" Amen ! " repeated a kind of echo, which seemed to come from the depths of the church.

The Duc de Guise, who was performing, as we have said, the functions of constable, went up to the altar, depositing his sword before the tabernacle, where it was blessed by the cardinal. The latter then drew it from the scabbard, and taking it by the blade presented it to the king, who took it by the hilt.

" Sire," said he, " take this sword, which is given to you with the blessing of God ; and may you, with its help and the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, resist all your enemies and protect and defend the holy Church and the kingdom which is confided to you. Take this sword, by the aid of which you may exercise justice, protect the widows and orphans, repress all disorders, and, covered with glory and virtues, may you deserve to reign with Him whose image you are on earth, and who reigns with the Father and the Holy Ghost in all eternity to come."

The duke lowered the sword so that the point touched the ground, and after having offered it to God, he returned to the Duc de Guise. The choir-boy then brought a

cushion, which he placed before the Duc d'Anjou, who knelt upon it.

The cardinal then opened the little silver-gilt box, and with the point of a gold needle he drew from it a particle of the holy oil, which he put on the paten ; then holding the paten in his left hand, he said two prayers over the duke. After which, taking the chrism on his thumbs, he drew a cross on the top of the duke's head, saying :—

“ *Ungo te in regem de oleo sanctificato, in nomine Patri et Filii et Spiritus sancti.*”

The choir-boy then wiped it off almost immediately with a gold-embroidered handkerchief.

At this moment the cardinal took the crown in both hands and held it above without placing it on the prince's head. The Duc de Guise and the Duc de Mayenne immediately approached and supported the crown, one on either side. Finally, the cardinal, holding it only with his left hand, blessed the prince with his right hand, and said,—

“ God crowns thee with the crown of glory and justice.

Then placing it on the prince's head :—

“ Receive this crown,” he said, “ in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.”

The Duc d'Anjou, pale and trembling, felt the crown rest on his head, and instinctively raised his hand to it. The choir-boy touched the bell, and all those present bowed their heads, but they immediately raised them, and brandishing their swords, cried, “ Long live King François III. !”

“ Sire,” said the cardinal to the Duc d'Anjou, “ from this day you reign over France, crowned by Pope Gregory XIII. himself, whose representative I am.”

“ *Ventre de biche !*” said Chicot, “ what a pity I have not the king's evil.”

“ Gentlemen,” said the Duc d'Anjou, rising, proud and majestic, “ I shall never forget the names of the thirteen gentlemen who first thought me worthy of reigning over them ; and now farewell, gentlemen. May God watch over and protect you !”

The cardinal bowed, as did the Duc de Guise; but Chicot, who could see them sideways, saw the two Lorraine princes exchange a mocking smile, while the Duc de Mayenne escorted the new king.

"*Ouais!*" said the Gascon, "what is the meaning of this, and of what use is the game where every one cheats?"

During that time the Duc d'Anjou had reached the stairs leading to the crypt, and he soon disappeared in the gloom of the subterranean church, followed by all the actors in this scene save the three brothers, who entered the vestry-room while the brother doorkeeper extinguished the tapers on the altar.

The choir-boy closed the crypt behind them, and the church remained lighted only by that one lamp, which seemed a symbol unknown to the masses, and understood only by the select few of some mysterious initiation.

CHAPTER XXI.

HOW CHICOT, EXPECTING TO LEARN HISTORY, LEARNED GENEALOGY INSTEAD.

CHICOT rose from his confessional to stretch his stiffened limbs. As he had every reason to think that this scene was the final one, and as it was nearly two o'clock in the morning, he was anxious to settle his plans for the remainder of the night. But to his great surprise, after they heard the key turn twice in the door leading to the crypt, the three Lorraine princes came out of the vestry-room; only this time they had discarded their monastic garb and resumed their usual dress. As he saw them reappear, the boy burst into such a boisterous, merry peal of laughter that Chicot caught the contagion and laughed too, without knowing why. The Duc de Mayenne quickly approached the staircase.

" Do not laugh so loud, sister," said he ; " they have hardly left, and they might hear you."

" His sister ! " said Chicot, going from surprise to surprise. " Does this little monk happen to be a woman ? "

In fact, the novice now threw back his hood and uncovered the wittiest and most charming woman's face that Leonardo da Vinci had ever traced on canvas, and yet he painted the *Mona Lisa*.

There were black eyes, sparkling with mischief, but which, when their pupils were dilated, and the ebon circle enlarged, assumed an almost terrible expression from their very seriousness ; a small red mouth, a little straight nose of the most regular design, and finally rounded chin terminated the perfect oval of a rather pale face, further accentuated by two slender arched eyebrows.

This was MM. de Guise's sister, Madame de Montpensier,—a dangerous siren, clever in dissimulation beneath the thick monk's robe the greatly reproached imperfection of one shoulder a little higher than the other, and the inelegant curve of her right leg, which made her slightly lame. Thanks to these imperfections, the soul of a demon inhabited this body to which God had given the head of an angel.

Chicot recognized her, for he had seen her twenty times pay her court to Queen Louise de Vaudemont, her cousin, and a great mystery was revealed to him by her presence, and that of her three brothers, who remained after all the others had left.

" Ah, my brother the cardinal," said the duchess, in a spasm of mirth, " what a holy man you make, and how well you speak of God ! I was frightened for one moment, and thought you were taking things seriously ; and he let himself be greased and crowned. Oh, how ugly he looked beneath that crown ! "

" Never mind," said the duke, " we have what we wished, and François can no longer withdraw. That Monsoreau, who no doubt concealed some dark plan,

arried the matter so far that we are now sure he will not abandon us as he did La Mole and Coonnas, half-way to the scaffold."

" Oh, oh ! " said the Duc de Mayenne, " that is a road that princes of our race do not easily travel, and it will always be shorter to go from the Louvre to the Abbey of Sainte-Genevieve than from the Hôtel de Ville to the place de Grève."

Chicot understood that the Duc d'Anjou had been laughed at ; and as he cordially detested that prince, he would willingly have thanked the Guises for this mystification and embraced them, with the exception of Mayenne, in place of whom he would give double share to Madame de Montpensier.

" Let us return to business, gentlemen," said the cardinal. " Is everything well closed ? "

" Oh, I can answer for that," said the duchess ; besides, I can go and see."

" Not at all," said the duke ; " you must be tired, my dear little choir-boy."

" Faith, no ! This is too amusing."

" Mayenne, you say he is here ? " asked the duke.

" Yes."

" I have not seen him."

" I should think not ; he is hidden."

" Where ? "

" In a confessional."

These words rang in Chicot's ears like the hundred thousand trumpets of the apocalypse.

" Who can be hidden in a confessional ? " he asked himself, twisting in his box. " *Ventre de biche !* I see only myself."

" Then he has seen and heard everything ? " asked the duke.

" No matter. Does he not belong to us ? "

" Bring him to me, Mayenne," said the duke.

Mayenne went down the steps of the chancel, looked round, and directed his footsteps straight to the confessional occupied by our Gascon. Chicot was brave,

but this time his teeth chattered, and a cold perspiration gathered on his brow.

“ Ah,” said he to himself, trying to extricate his sword from the folds of his dress, “ I don’t wish to die like a rascal in this box. Let us go to meet death, *ventre à biche !* And since I have an opportunity, I shall at least kill him before I die.”

And to put his daring plan into execution, Chicot, who had finally found the hilt of his sword, had already placed his hand on the latch of the door, when the voice of the duchess was heard.

“ Not in that one, Mayenne,” said she, “ not in that one. In the other one, way back, to the left.”

“ Ah, very well,” said the duke who had already extended his hand towards Chicot’s confessional, and who, following his sister’s indications, made at once for the opposite one.

“ *Ouf !* ” said the Gascon, breathing a sigh which Gorenfot might have envied him, “ it was time ; but who the devil is in the other one ? ”

“ Come out, Maître Nicolas David,” said Mayenne, “ we are alone.”

“ Here I am, monseigneur,” said a man, stepping out of the confessional.

“ Good ! ” said the Gascon. “ You were wanting at the fête, Maître Nicolas. I was looking everywhere for you ; and now, at the moment when I had given you up, I find you.”

“ You saw and heard everything, did you not ? ” said the Duc de Guise.

“ I did not lose a word of what has taken place ; and I assure that I shall not forget one detail, monseigneur.”

“ You can therefore report everything to the envoy of his Holiness, Pope Gregory XIII. ? ” asked Le Balafré.

“ Everything, without any omissions.”

“ Now, my brother Mayenne tells me that you have done wonders for us. Let us hear.”

The duchess and cardinal drew nearer from curiosity. The three Lorraine princes and their sister now formed

ngle group. Nicolas David stood three paces further, in the full light of the lamp.

"I have done as I promised, monseigneur," said Nicolas David. "I have found the means of placing you, without opposition, on the throne of France."

"They too!" cried Chicot. "Ah, so every one covets the throne of France. Good luck to the last."

We see that our good Chicot's spirits had risen again. His mirth was due to three causes. First, he had unexpectedly escaped a great danger; then he had discovered a good conspiracy; finally, in this good conspiracy he found the means of ruining his two greatest enemies,—the Duc de Mayenne and Nicolas David.

"Dear Gorenfot," he murmured, when all these ideas were finally arranged in his head, "what a supper I shall lay you to-morrow for the loan of your gown!"

"And if the usurpation is too flagrant, let us dispense with this means," said Henri de Guise. "I do not wish to ave against me all the kings of christendom who are here by divine right."

"I bethought me of this scruple of Monseigneur's," said the lawyer, bowing to the duke, and looking at the triumvirate with a calm glance. "I am not only clever in the art of fencing, monseigneur, as my enemies may have said, to deprive me of your confidence. Having studied law and theology, I consulted, as every good lawyer should do, the annals and decrees which give weight to my assertion in our habits of succession to the throne. We win all by gaining lawful right; and I have discovered, gentlemen, that you are the legitimate heirs, and that the Valois are only a parasitical and usurping ranch."

The confidence with which Nicolas David uttered this opening speech gave great joy to Madame de Montensier, greatly excited the curiosity of M. de Mayenne and of the cardinal, and almost caused the Duc de Guise's severe brow to unbend.

"It seemed difficult, however," said the latter, "that

the house of Lorraine, though very illustrious, should claim seniority over that of Valois."

" Yet it is proved, monseigneur," said Maître Nicola, raising his robe to draw a roll of parchment from his wide hose, and displaying at the same time the hilt of a long sword. The duke took the parchment from Nicola David's hands.

" What is that ? " he asked.

" The genealogical tree of the house of Lorraine."

" Whose stem is—?"

" Charlemagne, monseigneur."

" Charlemagne ! " cried the three brothers in a tone of incredulity, which was not, however, exempt from certain satisfaction. " It is impossible. The first duke of Lorraine was a contemporary of Charlemagne's, but he was named Ranier, and was in no way related to the great emperor."

" Wait, monseigneur," said Nicolas. " You understand that I have not chosen one of those questions which are settled by a first denial. What you need is a good lawsuit, which will last a long time, occupy the parliament and the people, during which you can seduce, not the people who are already yours, but the parliament. So, monseigneur, here it is : Ranier, first duke of Lorraine, contemporary of Charlemagne. Guilbert, his son, contemporary of Louis the Pious. Henri, son of Guilbert, contemporary of Charles the Bald."

" But,—" said the Duc de Guise.

" A little patience, monseigneur ; here we are. Listen well. Bonne—"

" Yes," said the duke, " daughter of Ricin, second son of Ranier."

" Well," resumed the lawyer, " married to whom ? "

" Bonne ? "

" Yes."

" To Charles of Lorraine, son of Louis IV., king of France."

" To Charles of Lorraine, son of Louis IV., king of France," repeated David. " Now add : brother

othaire, despoiled of the crown of France by the usurper Hugues Capet over Louis V."

"Oh, oh!" exclaimed the Duc de Mayenne and the cardinal together.

"Continue," said Le Balafré; "there is a glimmer in that."

"Now, Charles of Lorraine inherited from his brother Lothaire after the extinction of the latter's race. Now, Lothaire's race is all extinct; therefore, gentlemen, you are the true and only heirs to the crown of France."

"*Mordieu!*" said Chicot, "the animal is even more venomous than I thought."

"What do you say to that, brother?" inquired the Duc de Mayenne and the cardinal.

"I say," replied Le Balafré, "that there unfortunately exists in France a law, called the Salic law, which destroys all our claims."

"This is where I expected you, monseigneur," cried Chicot, with a feeling of gratified pride. "What is the first example of the Salic law?"

"The accession of Philip of Valois to the exclusion of Edward of England."

"What is the date of this accession?"

Le Balafré searched his memory.

"1328," replied the Cardinal of Lorraine, without hesitation.

"Three hundred and forty-one years after Hugues Capet's usurpation; two hundred and forty years after the extinction of Lothaire's race. Therefore, your ancestors had had a right to the throne for two hundred and forty years when the Salic law was invented. Now, every one knows that the law has no retrospective action."

"You are a clever man, Maître Nicolas David" said Le Balafré, looking at the lawyer with an admiration which was not without a slight mixture of contempt.

"That is very ingenious," said the cardinal.

"That is very fine," said Mayenne.

"It is admirable," said the duchess. "I am now a

royal princess. I shall take no one but an emperor of Germany as a husband."

" My Lord God," said Chicot, " you know that I have never made but one prayer : *Ne nos inducas in tentationem, et libera nos ab avocatis.*"

The Duc de Guise had alone remained silent in the midst of the general enthusiasm.

" And to think that such subterfuges are necessary to man like me ! " he murmured. " To think that before they obey, people will look at parchments like this one instead of reading the man's nobility in the glitter of his eye or of his sword."

" You are right, Henri,—ten times right ; and if they only looked at the face, you would be king among kings since the other princes, they say, look like clowns beside you. But the essential to mount the throne is, as Maître Nicolas David just said, a good lawsuit ; and when we have reached there, as you said yourself, our escutcheons must bear comparison with those suspended above the other thrones of Europe."

" Then this genealogy is good," continued Henri de Guise, with a sigh, " and here are the two hundred gold crowns which my brother Mayenne asked for you, Maître Nicolas David."

" And here are two hundred more," said the cardinal to the lawyer, who smiled with pleasure as he dropped the gold into his large pockets, " for the new mission we are about to confide to you."

" Speak, monseigneur ; I am entirely at your Eminence's orders."

" We cannot commission you to carry to Rome, to our holy father Gregory XIII., this genealogy to which he must give his approbation. Your rank is too humble for the doors of the Vatican to open before you."

" Alas ! " said Nicolas David ; " I have a great heart, it is true, but I am of lowly birth. Ah, if I had only been a simple gentleman ! "

" Will you hush, vagabond ? " said Chicot.

" But you are not," said the cardinal, " and it is

isfortune. We are therefore obliged to intrust this mission to Pierre de Gondy."

"Stop, brother," said the duchess, who had resumed her gravity; "the Gondys are no doubt men of talent, but we have no hold on them. Their ambition alone binds them to us, and that they can satisfy with King Henri as well as with the house of Guise."

"My sister is right, Louis," said the Duc de Mayenne, with his usual brutality, "and we cannot trust in Pierre de Gondy as we can trust in Nicolas David, who is our man, and whom we can have hung when we please."

This sally of the duke, thrust into the poor lawyer's face, produced the strangest effect on that wretched man; he burst into a convulsive fit of laughter, which denoted the greatest fear.

"My brother Charles is jesting," said Henri de Guise to the trembling lawyer, "and we know that you are our faithful man; you have proved it in many affairs."

"And notably in mine," thought Chicot, shaking his fist at his enemy,—or rather, his two enemies.

"Calm your fears, Charles; calm your fears, Catherine; all my measures are taken in advance. Pierre de Gondy will carry this genealogy to Rome, but mixed up with her papers, and without knowing what he is carrying. The Pope will approve or disapprove, without Gondy's knowing this approbation or disapprobation. Finally Gondy, still ignorant of what he carries, will return to France with this genealogy approved or disapproved. You, Nicolas David, will depart almost at the same time as he, and will await him at Chalons, Lyons, or Avignon, according to the advice you may receive from us to stop at one or the other of these three cities. Therefore, you will hold the true secret of the enterprise. You see that you will still be our only trusted man."

David bowed.

"You know on what condition, dear friend," murmured Chicot,—"on condition of being hung if you go astray. But don't be uneasy. I swear by Saint Genevieve, here resent in plaster, marble, or wood, perhaps even in bone,

that you are placed at this moment between two gibets but the one nearest to you, dear friend, is the one I am preparing."

The three brothers pressed each other's hands and embraced their sister the duchess, who had just brought them their three monks' robes, left in the vestry-room ; then having aided them in putting on these protecting garments, she pulled her hood over her face and led the way to the door, which was opened by the brother doorkeeper. They disappeared, followed by Nicolas David, whose gold crowns jingled at every step.

The doorkeeper drew the bolts behind them, and returning into the church, extinguished the lamp in the chancel. A compact darkness immediately invaded the chapeau and renewed that mysterious horror which more than once had made Chicot's hair bristle. Then the sound of the monk's sandals on the stone floor gradually grew fainter, and finally died away altogether.

Five minutes, which seemed very long to our Gascon, now elapsed, during which nothing broke the silence and obscurity.

"Good!" said Chicot ; "it seems as if all were really finished this time. The three acts have been played, and all the actors are gone. Let us try to follow them ; we have had enough comedy for one night."

And Chicot, who had given up his idea of waiting for daylight in the church, after having seen movable tombstones and inhabited confessionals, gently raised the latch, opened the door carefully, and stepped out of his box. During the choir-boy's inspection tour, Chicot had spied in one corner a ladder destined to be used when cleaning the stained glass windows. He lost no time. With hands extended and careful movements he reached the corner without making any noise, put his hand on the ladder, and guiding himself as best he could, placed the ladder against a window. By the light of the moon Chicot saw that he had made no mistake in his calculations ; the window looked out on the convent cemetery which was itself bounded by the Rue Bordelle. He

opened the window, straddled it, and drawing up the adder with that strength and skill which are always the result of fear or joy, he succeeded in passing it from the inside to the outside.

Once on the ground, he hid the ladder behind a yew hedge, at the foot of the wall, glided from grave to grave, until he reached the last barrier which separated him from the street, and scaled it, not without dislodging a few stones, which descended with him into the street.

Chicot now took a deep breath. He had come out with only a few scratches from a scrape in which he had felt more than once that his life might be the forfeit. Then when he had felt the fresh air fill his lungs, he started on run in the direction of the Rue Saint-Jacques and only stopped at the door of the Corne d'Abondance, where he knocked without hesitation or delay.

Maître Claude Bonhomet came to the door in person. He was a man who knew that all disturbances are paid for, and he counted on extras more than on ordinary things to make his fortune. He recognized Chicot at the first glance, although Chicot had gone out as a cavalier and returned as a monk.

"Ah, is it you, monsieur," said he. "You are welcome."

Chicot gave him a crown.

"And Brother Gorenfot?" he asked.

A broad smile illumined the innkeeper's countenance. He went to the little room and pushed open the door.

"Look," said he.

Brother Gorenfot was snoring in the same place where Chicot had left him.

"*Ventre de biche!* my worthy friend," said the Gascon, "you have just had a good nightmare without knowing it."

CHAPTER XXII.

HOW MONSIEUR AND MADAME DE SAINT-LUC WERE TRAVELLING SIDE BY SIDE, AND WERE JOINED BY ANOTHER TRAVELLING COMPANION.

THE next morning at about the hour when Brother Gorenflot, warmly tucked in his robe, opened his eyes, our reader, had he been travelling on the road from Paris to Angers, might have seen, between Chartres and Nogent, a gentleman and his page whose gentle horses, ambling side by side, spoke to each other with neighs and snorts like honest animals, who, though deprived of the power of speech, have none the less found a means to exchange their thoughts.

The cavaliers had reached Chartres the day before, at about this same hour, with their horses covered with foam. One of the two horses had even fallen on the cathedral place ; and as Mass had just finished, the sight of the beautiful horse expiring there, while its owner seemed in no way concerned, had not been an uninteresting spectacle for the worthy *bourgeois* of Chartres.

Some had observed,—the *bourgeois* of Chartres have always been great observers,—some had even observed that the taller of the two had slipped a crown into the hand of an honest fellow who had conducted him and his companion to a neighbouring inn. Half an hour later, through the back door of the inn, which opened on the plain, the two travellers had come out, mounted on fresh horses ; and their cheeks were flushed in a way that spoke in favor of the warm wine that had just been served to them.

Once they were far out in the cold, bare country, already showing here and there the blue mists, heralds of coming spring, the taller of the two cavaliers approached the smaller one, and opening his arms, said,—

“ Dear little wife, give me a quiet kiss ; we have now no more cause to fear.”

Then Madame de Saint-Luc, for it was she, leaned gracefully over, opening the heavy cloak in which she was wrapped, and putting her two hands on the young man's shoulders, gave him the long, tender kiss he was asking while her eyes never left his glance.

The result of the assurance which Saint-Luc had given his wife, and perhaps too of the kiss given by Madame de Saint-Luc to her husband, was that they stopped that day in a little hostelry of the village of Courville, only four leagues beyond Chartres, and which, by its lonely situation, its double doors, and numerous other advantages, offered the lovers every guarantee of security.

There they remained all day and all night, mysteriously hidden in their little room, where, after having breakfasted they retired, telling their host that considering the long journey they had taken, and the fatigue resulting therefrom, they did not wish to be disturbed until the next morning at daybreak. Their orders were punctually obeyed.

It is, therefore, on the morning of this second day that we find Monsieur and Madame de Saint-Luc on the road from Chartres to Nogent.

Now, this day, as they were even less uneasy than the day before, they travelled no longer as fugitives, nor even as lovers, but as school children, who stop at every turn to admire each other, perched as equestrian statues on the wayside hillocks, breaking the first buds, seeking the first blossoms, gathering the first flowers, those sentinels of spring which come through the fast-disappearing snow, and finding infinite joy in the reflection of a sunbeam on the iridescent plumage of a duck or in the passage of a hare across the plain.

"*Morbleu !*" suddenly cried Saint-Luc ; " how good it is to be free. Have you ever been free, Jeanne ? "

" I ? " replied the young woman, with a joyous ring in her voice ; " never. It is the first time that I have all the air and space that I wish. My father is suspicious, my mother likes to remain at home. I never went out without a governess, two maids, and a footman. I don't

remember having run on a lawn since, as a gay and laughing child, I romped in the woods of Méridor with my dear Diane, running races through the thickets, running until we could no longer find each other. Then we would stop and listen, with trembling limbs, to the flight of some doe or deer, which, frightened by us, left its cover, while we questioned each other in the silence of the vast forest. But you, my beloved Saint-Luc, you at least were free ?

“ I free ? ”

“ No doubt, a man— ”

“ Ah, yes ! never. Brought up near the Duc d’Anjou, having accompanied him to Poland, then back again to Paris, condemned by that perpetual law of etiquette never to leave him, or, so soon as I did so, pursued by that lamentable voice which cried incessantly :—

“ ‘ Saint-Luc, my friend, I am bored ; come and be bored with me.’ Free, with those corsets that compressed my stomach, that large starched ruff that scratched my neck, that hair curled with gum which would become tangled in the dampness or soiled in the dust ; and, finally, that cap nailed to my head with pins. Oh, no, no ! my good Jeanne, I think I was even less free than you. So you see how I take advantage of my freedom. Heavens ! how good it is, and how can one do without it when it is possible to do otherwise.”

“ And if we are caught, Saint-Luc ? ” said the young woman, casting an uneasy glance behind her ; “ if we are put into the Bastille ? ”

“ If we are put there together, my little Jeanne, it will only be half bad. It seems to me that we remained locked up all day yesterday, neither more nor less than if we had been state prisoners, yet time passed quickly enough.”

“ Saint-Luc, don’t count on that,” said Jeanne, with a merry smile ; “ if we are caught, I don’t think we shall be locked up together.” And the charming woman blushed after having said so much and yet so little.

“ Then let us hide well,” said Saint-Luc.

“ Oh, don’t worry ! ” said Jeanne. “ In that respect we shall have nothing to fear, and shall be well concealed,

If you knew Méridor, and the great oaks which look like the pillars of some temple that has heaven for its roof, the endless grooves, and lazy streams that flow in summer beneath sombre arches of verdure, and in winter beneath layers of dead leaves ; then the large ponds, the wheat-fields, the flower-beds, the endless lawns, and the little turrets whence come countless flocks of pigeons, turning and buzzing like bees around a hive, and then—and then— That is not all, Saint-Luc. In the midst of this, the queen of that little kingdom, the enchantress of these gardens of Armida, the good, the beautiful, the incomparable Diane. A heart of diamond beneath a golden covering. You will love her, Saint-Luc”

“ I already love her ; she has loved you.”

“ Oh, I am very sure that she still loves, and will always love me. Diane is not fickle in her friendships. Think of the happy life we shall lead in that nest of flowers and moss which will grow green with the spring. Diane manages her father’s household ; we therefore need not worry about him. He is a warrior of the time of Francis I., who has become weak and inoffensive for the very reason that he was formerly strong and brave. He has but one memory in the past,—the conqueror of Marignan, and the vanquished hero of Pavia ; but one love in the present, and one hope in the future,—his beloved Diane. We shall be able to inhabit Méridor without his knowing or ever perceiving it. And if he should know it ! Well, we shall tell him that Diane is the most beautiful woman in the world, and that King Francis I. was the greatest general of all the ages.”

“ That will be charming,” said Saint-Luc ; “ but I foresee great quarrels.”

“ How so ? ”

“ Between the baron and me.”

“ About what ? About King Francis I. ? ”

“ No. I shall let him have his greatest captain, but about the most beautiful woman in the world—”

“ I no longer count ; I am your wife.”

“ Ah, very true ! ” said Saint-Luc.

" Do you picture to yourself that existence, beloved ? " continued Jeanne. " In the morning we shall go into the woods through the little door of the pavilion she will give us as a lodging. I know that pavilion ; two turrets united to each other by a main building, erected in the time of Louis XII. A splendid architecture which you will adore, you who love flowers and lace. And from the windows,—ah, the windows !—a calm and quiet view of the great woods which extend as far as the eye can reach, while away down the avenues we can see the deer and does browsing in the distance, and raising their heads at the slightest noise. Then, on the opposite side, the perspective opens on golden plains, on villages with white walls and red roofs, on the Loire, glittering in the sun, and covered with little boats. Then, three leagues away, we shall have a lake with a bark among the reeds, our horses, our dogs, with which we shall ride through the great woods, while the old baron, ignorant of his guests, will hearken to the distant noises, and say to his daughter : ' Listen, Diane ; one would think that Astrea and Phlegethon were hunting.' ' And if they be hunting, let them hunt,' Diane will answer."

" Let us hasten, Jeanne," said Saint-Luc. " I wish we were already at Méridor."

Then both urged their horses that flew along the roads for the distance of two or three leagues, after which they stopped to allow their masters to resume an interrupted conversation, or correct a kiss which was not as it should be.

Thus did they travel from Chartres to the Mans, where, being more reassured, they spent one day ; then the day following that day which was such a happy one, on the happy road they were travelling, they set out through the sandy forests, which at that time extended from Guécelard to Écomoy, with the firm intention of reaching Méridor that evening.

Having once reached that point, Saint-Luc considered himself out of danger, he who knew the alternately lazy and fiery disposition of the king. According to the state

of mind in which the latter found himself at the moment of Saint-Luc's departure, he must have sent twenty Swiss or a hundred guards after them with orders to bring them back alive or dead, or he merely breathed a sigh, stretched his arms out of bed a little further than usual, and murmured :

“ Oh, traitor of a Saint-Luc ! why did I not know you sooner ? ”

Now, as the fugitives had been joined by no courier, had perceived no guards, it is probable that instead of being in his fiery humor, King Henri III. was in his lazy mood. This is at least what Saint-Luc said, as he threw from time to time a glance behind him down that solitary road on which there was not the slightest pursuer to be seen.

“ Well,” said he, “ the storm will have fallen on poor Chicot, who, jester though he is, or perhaps because he is a jester, gave me such good advice. I shall get off with some more or less witty anagram.”

And Saint-Luc remembered a terrible anagram made on him by Chicot, while he was in favor.

Suddenly he felt his wife's hand laid upon his arm. He started. It was not a caress.

“ Look ! ” said Jeanne.

Saint-Luc turned round, and against the horizon he saw a horseman who followed the same road they did, and who seemed to urge his horse forward. This horseman was on the summit of a hillock, strongly outlined against the gray sky ; and by that effect of perspective which our readers may sometimes have noticed, he seemed in that position larger than life.

This fact struck Saint-Luc as an evil omen, either because of his frame of mind, to which reality had just brought such a direct contradiction, or because, in spite of his pretended calm, he feared some capricious return of King Henri III.

“ Yes, in fact,” he said, turning pale, “ that is a horseman.”

“ Let us fly,” said Jeanne, putting spurs to her horse.

"Not at all," said Saint-Luc, who, in spite of his fear did not lose his presence of mind ; "not at all. So far as I can judge, that horseman is alone, and we must not fly from a single man. Let us step to one side, and let him pass ; when he shall have gone by, we can continue our way."

"But if he stop?"

"Well, if he stop, we shall see with whom we have to deal, and shall act as befits circumstances."

"You are right," said Jeanne ; "and I was wrong to fear, since my Saint-Luc is here to defend me."

"Never mind, let us flee," said Saint-Luc, casting a last glance on the unknown, who, when he perceived them, had started his horse at a gallop ; "there is a plume on that hat, and under that hat a ruff, which give me some uneasiness."

"Oh, *mon Dieu* ! how can a feather and ruff cause you uneasiness ?" asked Jeanne, as she followed her husband, who had seized her horse by the bridle and drew it towards the wood.

"Because the feather is of a color now very much the fashion at court, and the ruff is of a very new cut ; now, it is one of those feathers which would cost too much to dye, and one of those ruffs which give too much trouble to starch, for either to belong to a gentleman from Le Mans, —some countryman of those capons so greatly appreciated by Chicot. Onward, onward, Jeanne ! That horseman looks to me like an ambassador from the king, my august master."

"Onward !" said the young woman, trembling like a leaf at the thought that she might be separated from her husband.

But this was more easily said than done. The pines were very thick, and formed a real wall of branches. Moreover, the horses sank up to their breasts in the sandy soil. During that time, the horseman approached like lightning, and the gallop of his horse could be heard, coming down the slope of the mountain.

"He is really after us ! Lord Jesus !" cried Jeanne.

" Well," said Saint-Luc stopping. " if he is after us, let us see what he wants. If we dismount, he will join us."

" He stops," said the young woman.

" He is even dismounting," said Saint-Luc; " he enters the wood. Upon my word, should it be the devil in person, I shall go to meet him."

" Wait," said Jeanne holding back her husband, " wait; he is calling, I think."

In fact, the unknown, having tied his horse to one of the pines on the edge of the wood, came towards them crying out,—

" Eh, monsieur, monsieur! Do not run away, by all the devils! I bring something that you have lost."

" What is he saying?" asked the countess.

" Why," said Saint-Luc, " he says we have lost something."

" Eh, monsieur!" continued the unknown, " you lost our bracelet in the inn of Courville. The devil! a woman's picture cannot be lost thus, particularly that respectable Madame de Cossé's portrait. For that dear mamma's sake, don't make me run so fast."

" But I know that voice!" cried Saint-Luc.

" And he speaks of my mother."

" Have you lost that bracelet, dearest?"

" Oh, *mon Dieu!* yes. I only noticed the loss this morning; I could not remember where I had left it."

" But it is Bussy," suddenly cried Saint-Luc.

" Le Comte de Bussy," repeated Jeanne, with emotion, our friend."

" Why, certainly, our friend," said Saint-Luc, running onward to meet the young man with as much eagerness as he had first displayed to avoid him.

" Saint-Luc! I was not mistaken," said Bussy's ringing voice, and in a single bound he was beside his friends.

" How are you, madame," he continued as he laughingly offered to the countess the portrait which she had really forgotten in the inn of Courville, where, as we remember, the travellers had spent the night.

"Have you come to arrest us by order of the king Monsieur de Bussy?" asked Jeanne, with a smile.

"No, indeed; I am not sufficiently friendly with the king for him to give me confidential missions. No, I found your bracelet at Courville, and that was an indication that we were following the same road. I hastened on, perceived you, guessed it was you, and began a pursuit without wishing it. Excuse me."

"So," said Saint-Luc, with a lingering suspicion, "it is chance alone that made you follow the same road as we."

"Only chance," replied Bussy; "and now that I have met you, I shall say providence."

Every doubt now vanished from Saint-Luc's mind before the handsome young man's bright eye and sincere smile.

"So you are travelling?" said Jeanne.

"I am," replied Bussy, as he mounted his horse.

"But not like us."

"No, unfortunately."

"Not on account of being in disgrace, I mean."

"Faith! perhaps a little."

"And you are going—?"

"I am going towards Angers. And you?"

"We too."

"Yes, I understand. Brissac is about ten leagues from here, between Angers and Saumur, and you are taking refuge in the paternal manor, like frightened doves. It is charming, and I would envy your happiness if envy were not such an ugly fault."

"Eh, Monsieur de Bussy," said Jeanne, with a grateful look, "get married, and you will be as happy as we are. I assure you that happiness is an easy thing when we love."

And with a smile she turned to Saint-Luc, as though she appealed to him.

"Madame," said Bussy, "I am a little afraid of the kind of happiness. Every one does not marry like you with the king's permission."

" Come, come,—you, the universally beloved man ! "

" When one is universally beloved, madame, it is just as one were not loved at all," said Bussy, with a sigh.

" Well," said Jeanne, giving her husband a knowing look, " let me marry you off. To begin with, your marriage would give peace to a good many jealous husbands that I know ; and then I promise to give you that happiness the existence of which you deny."

" I do not deny the existence of happiness, madame ; only deny that such happiness should fall to my lot."

" Will you let me marry you off ? " repeated Jeanne.

" If you marry me according to your taste, no ; if you marry me according to my own, yes."

" You say that as if you had made up your mind to remain a bachelor."

" Perhaps."

" But are you, then, in love with some woman whom you cannot marry ? "

" Count," said Bussy, " in the name of pity, beg madame de Saint-Luc not to bury a thousand daggers in my heart ! "

" Now, take care, Bussy, or you will make me believe that you are in love with my wife ! "

" In that case you will admit that I am a lover full of delicacy, and that husbands would be very wrong to be jealous of me."

" Ah, that is true," said Saint-Luc, remembering that it was Bussy who had brought his wife to the Louvre. But never mind, confess that your heart is gone."

" I confess it," said Bussy.

" Through love, or a mere fancy ? " asked Jeanne.

" Through passion, madame."

" I shall cure you."

" I don't think so."

" I shall marry you off."

" I doubt it."

" I shall make you as happy as you deserve to be."

" Alas ! madame, my only happiness now consists in being unhappy."

" I am very obstinate, and I warn you," said Jeanne.

" And I," said Bussy.

" Count, you will yield."

" Come, madame," said the young man, " let us travel like good friends. Let us first leave this sandy place, if you please ; then we shall reach for the night that charming little village that reflects the sunshine."

" That one or some other."

" No matter ; I have no preference."

" Then you accompany us ? "

" As far as I am going, unless you offer some objection."

" On the contrary. But, better still, come with us."

" Where are you going ? "

" To the Château de Méridor."

All the blood rushed first to Bussy's head and then to his heart. He even turned so pale that his secret would have been discovered had not Jeanne looked at her husband just then. Bussy had therefore time to recover, while the husband and wife, or rather, the two lovers exchanged glances full of tenderness, and to return trick for trick ; only his trick consisted in profound silence concerning his intentions.

" To the Château de Méridor, madame ! " said he, when he had recovered enough strength to utter that name

" What is that, if you please ? "

" The estate of one of my good friends," replied Jeanne.

" Of one of your good friends—and—" continued Bussy, " is she now on her estates ? "

" No doubt," answered Madame de Saint-Luc, who was in complete ignorance of the events that had taken place at Méridor during the past two months. " Have you never heard of the Baron de Méridor, one of the richest barons of Poitou, and—"

" And—" repeated Bussy, seeing Jeanne stop.

" And his daughter, Diane de Méridor, the most beautiful baron's daughter that was ever seen ? "

" No, madame," replied Bussy, almost overcome with emotion.

And while Jeanne glanced again at her husband with a

singular look, the handsome young man asked himself by what strange chance he met on the way with people who spoke to him of Diane de Méridor, and echoed the only thought that filled his heart.

Was it a surprise ? That was not probable. Was it a snare ? That was almost impossible. Saint-Luc was no longer in Paris when Bussy entered Madame de Monsoreau's house and learned that Madame de Monsoreau was named Diane de Méridor.

"And is this castle still very distant, madame ?" asked Bussy.

"About seven leagues, I think ; and I would offer to wager that it is there, and not in the little village gleaming in the sunlight that we shall sleep to-night. You are coming, are you not ?"

"Yes, madame."

"Come," said Jeanne, "that is already one step towards the happiness I was proposing to you."

Bussy bowed, and continued to ride near the young couple, who, remembering the debt of gratitude they owed him, treated him most graciously. For some time all remained silent. Finally Bussy, who had still many things to learn, began to question them. It was the privilege of his position, and he seemed, moreover, disposed to make use of it.

"This Baron de Méridor, who you tell me is the richest man of Poitou, what kind of man is he ?" asked he.

"A perfect gentleman, a knight of former ages, who, had he lived in the days of King Arthur, would surely have had his place at the Round Table."

"And to whom has he married his daughter ?" asked Bussy, compressing the muscles of his face and the motion of his voice.

"Married his daughter ?"

"I am asking you."

"Diane married ?"

"Is there anything extraordinary in that ?"

"Nothing ; but Diane is not married. I surely would have been the first one told about it."

Bussy's heart swelled, and a painful sigh forced itself through his contracted throat.

"Then Mademoiselle de Méridor is at the *château* with her father?" he asked.

"We hope so," replied Saint-Luc, laying stress on his answer to show his wife that he had understood her, and that he approved her ideas and would aid in her plans. There was a pause, during which each one followed his own thoughts.

"Ah!" cried Jeanne, suddenly rising in her stirrups, "here are the turrets of the castle. Look, look! do you see, Monsieur de Bussy, in the midst of those tall, leafless trees which will be so beautiful within a month,—do you see the slate-covered roof?"

"Oh, yes, certainly," said Bussy, with an emotion which even astonished that brave heart. "Yes, I see; so that is the Château de Méridor?"

And by a natural reaction of mind at the aspect of this country, so beautiful and rich, even in the distress of Nature, at the aspect of this lordly manor, his thoughts reverted to the poor prisoner hidden amid the fogs of Paris, in the stifling abode of the Rue Saint-Antoine. This time he sighed again, but it was not entirely from sorrow. By promising him so much happiness, Madame de Saint-Luc almost made him hope for it.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE OLD MAN.

MADAME de Saint-Luc was not mistaken. Two hours later they stood before the gates of Méridor.

After the last words exchanged between the travellers, and which we have recorded above, Bussy was debating within himself if it would not be better to tell these good friends of the adventure which kept Diane away from Méridor. But if he once began his revelations, he must not only tell what every one would soon know, but also

what was known to him alone, and which he wished to reveal to no one. He naturally hesitated before a confession which would entail too many interpretations and questions.

And then Bussy wished to enter Méridor as a perfectly unknown man. He wished to meet M. de Méridor without any previous preparation, and hear him speak of M. de Monsoreau and of the Duc d'Anjou ; he wished to be convinced, not of the truthfulness of Diane's story, for he did not suspect that angel of purity capable of any falsehood, but that she herself had not been deceived on any point, and that the story to which he had listened with such powerful interest had been a faithful account of all the events.

Bussy, as we see, was moved by two sentiments which maintain the supremacy of the man in that sphere of thought where even the mad desires of love cannot affect him ; these two sentiments were prudence with strangers and profound respect for the loved one. Therefore, Madame de Saint-Luc, in spite of her feminine perspicacity, was deceived by Bussy's power over himself, and was convinced that the young man heard Diane's name for the first time, and that as this name awoke within him neither memory nor hope, he expected to find at Méridor some provincial maiden, very awkward and embarrassed in the presence of her new guests. She was therefore prepared to enjoy his surprise.

Yet one thing astonished her. It was the fact that the guard having blown his horn to announce a visitor, Diane had not rushed to the drawbridge ; and yet that was always the signal for her to appear.

But instead of Diane, there advanced beneath the wide porch of the castle an old man, bent with age, and leaning on a stick.

He was clad in a surtout of green velvet trimmed with fox-fur, and at his belt hung a little silver whistle and a bunch of keys. The night wind blew about his long hair, white as the last snows.

He crossed the drawbridge, followed by two large dogs

of German breed, who walked slowly behind him, keeping on an even line. When the old man reached the parapet

"Who is there?" he asked in a feeble voice; "and who honors a poor old man with a visit?"

"I, I, Seigneur Augustin," cried the young woman's merry voice.

Jeanne de Cossé always called the old man by that name to distinguish him from his younger brother Guillaume, who had only been dead three years. But the baron instead of replying to Jeanne's joyous exclamation, slowly raised his head, and looking at the travellers with sightless eyes:—

"You?" said he. "I cannot see. Who are you?"

"Oh, *mon Dieu!*" cried Jeanne; "do you not recognize me? Ah, true!—my disguise."

"Excuse me," said the old man, "but I can scarcely see. Old men's eyes are not made to weep; and when they weep, the tears burn them."

"Ah, dear baron!" said the young woman, "I see in truth that your eyesight is failing if you do not recognize me even in my masculine attire. I must then tell you my name."

"Yes," replied the old man, "since I tell you that I scarcely see you."

"Well, I shall catch you, dear Seigneur Augustin. I am Madame de Saint-Luc."

"Saint-Luc!" said the baron; "I do not know you."

"But my maiden name," said the laughing young woman,—"but my maiden name was Jeanne de Cossé Brissac."

"Ah, *mon Dieu!*" cried the old man, trying to open the gate with his trembling hands; "ah, *mon Dieu!*"

Jeanne, who understood nothing of this strange reception, which was so different from what she expected, attributed it to the old man's age, and to the decline of his faculties. When she saw herself finally recognized, she jumped down from her horse and threw herself into his arms, as was her habit; but as she embraced the baron, she felt the moisture on his cheeks. He was weeping.

"It is for joy," she thought. "Come! the heart is still young."

"Come," said the old man, after having embraced Jeanne. As though he had not even perceived her two companions, he walked towards the castle with his slow and measured step, always followed at the same distance by his two dogs, who had just taken the time to sniff and look at the visitors.

The castle had a strangely sad aspect,—all the blinds were closed. It looked like an immense tomb. The servants that were about passed to and fro, dressed in black. Saint-Luc glanced at his wife to ask her if she had thus expected to find the house. Jeanne understood; and as she was herself anxious to put an end to her perplexity, she approached the baron, and taking his hand,—

"Where is Diane?" she asked. "Is it my misfortune to find her away?"

The old man stood still, as if he had been struck by lightning, and looked at the young woman with an expression that was almost one of terror.

"Diane!" said he.

At the sound of this name the two dogs who stood on either side of their master gave utterance to a dismal howl. Bussy could not help shuddering. Jeanne looked at Saint-Luc, and Saint-Luc stopped, not knowing whether he should continue to advance or retreat.

"Diane!" repeated the old man, as if he had needed all this time to understand the question which had been put to him; "do you not know?"

And his voice, which was already weak and trembling, died away in a sob which came from the depths of his heart.

"But what is it? What has happened?" cried Jeanne, very much moved, and clasping her hands.

"Diane is dead!" cried the old man, raising his hands to heaven with a desperate gesture, and shedding a flood of tears, while he dropped on the lowest step of the porch they had now reached. He hid his face in his hands and

swayed his body to and fro, as if to drive away the memory which incessantly returned to torture him.

“ Dead ! ” cried Jeanne, struck with terror, and turning pale as a ghost.

“ Dead ! ” said Saint-Luc, full of tender compassion for the old man.

“ Dead ! ” murmured Bussy. “ He let him too believe her dead. Ah, poor old man ! How you will love me some day ! ”

“ Dead, dead ! ” repeated the baron ; “ they killed her.”

“ Ah, dear Seigneur Augustin,” said Jeanne, who after the terrible shock she had just received had found that resource which alone keeps women’s tender hearts from breaking,—tears. She began to sob, while her tears rained on the old man’s face, around whom she had thrown her arms. The old baron tottered to his feet.

“ No matter,” said he ; “ my house, though empty and desolate, is none the less hospitable. Enter.”

Jeanne took the old man’s arm under hers and led him up the porch, through the ancient guard-room, which had become a dining-room, and into the drawing-room. A servant, whose agitated face and tearful eyes spoke of his attachment to his master, went before them to open the doors. Saint-Luc and Bussy followed. Having reached the drawing-room, the old man, still supported by Jeanne, sat or rather sank into his large carved armchair. The footman opened a window to let in some air, and without leaving the room, retired into a corner. Jeanne did not dare break the silence. She trembled to open the old man’s wounds afresh by questioning him ; and yet, like all young and happy persons, she could not bring herself to look upon this misfortune as real. There is an age at which the mystery of death cannot be explored, because we do not believe in death.

The baron himself anticipated her desire by speaking again.

“ You told me you were married, my dear Jeanne. Is Monsieur your husband ? ” and he pointed to Bussy.

" No, Seigneur Augustin," replied Jeanne ; " here is M. de Saint-Luc."

Saint-Luc bowed to the unhappy father even lower than to the old man. The latter bowed paternally, and even tried to smile ; then turning his expressionless eyes towards Bussy,--

" Is Monsieur your brother, your husband's brother, or one of your relatives ? " he asked.

" No, dear baron ; Monsieur is not our relative, but our friend,—M. Louis de Clermont, Comte de Bussy d'Amboise, gentleman of M. le Duc d'Anjou."

At these words the old man sprang up, shot a terrible look at Bussy, and, exhausted by this silent provocation, fell back on his chair with a groan.

" What is it ? " asked Jeanne.

" Does the baron know you, Seigneur de Bussy ? " asked Saint-Luc.

" It is the first time I have the honor of seeing M. de Méridor," calmly replied Bussy, who alone understood the effect produced by the Duc d'Anjou's name.

" Ah, you serve M. le Duc d'Anjou," said the baron ; " you serve that monster, that demon, and you dare confess it, and you have the audacity to come to my house ! "

" Is he mad ? " whispered Saint-Luc to his wife, looking at the baron with amazement.

" Sorrow must have affected his mind," replied Jeanne, in terror.

M. de Méridor had accompanied these last words, which had led Jeanne to believe that he was no longer in his right mind, with a glance even more menacing than the first ; but Bussy maintained a calm attitude, which was one of respect, and did not reply.

" Yes, of that monster ! " pursued M. de Méridor, whose mind seemed to wander more and more ; " of my daughter's assassin ! "

" Poor man ! " murmured Bussy.

" But what is he saying ? " asked Jeanne, questioning in turn.

" Do you not know, you who are looking at me with

such surprise," cried M. de Méridor, clasping Jeanne's and Saint-Luc's hands in his own, " that the Duc d'Anjou killed my Diane,—the Duc d'Anjou ! My daughter, my child,—he killed her ! "

And the old man uttered these words in such a tone of anguish that tears came even to Bussy's eyes.

" Seigneur," said Madame de Saint-Luc, " if that be so—and I do not see how it is so—you cannot accuse of this misfortune M. de Bussy, the most loyal and generous nobleman that ever lived. But look, my good father, M. de Bussy knows nothing of what you are saying. M. de Bussy is weeping like us, and with us. Would he have come if he had suspected what welcome was in store for him ? Ah, dear Seigneur Augustin, in the name of your beloved Diane, tell us how the misfortune occurred."

" So you did not know ? " asked the old man, addressing Bussy.

Bussy bowed, without answering.

" *Mon Dieu !* no," said Jeanne ; " we were all in ignorance of this event."

" My Diane is dead, and her best friend was in ignorance of her death ! Ah, true ! I spoke and wrote of it to no one. It seemed to me that the world would no longer live when Diane ceased to live. It seemed to me that the whole universe must wear mourning for her."

" Speak, speak ! " said Jeanne ; " you will feel better."

" Well," said the baron, with a sob, " this infamous prince, a disgrace to the nobility of France, saw my Diane, and finding her so beautiful, had her carried off, and conducted to the Château de Beaugé, to bring her to shame, as if she had been the daughter of a serf. But Diane, my holy, saintly Diane, preferred death. She threw herself from a window into the lake, and only her veil was found floating on the surface."

The old man could not speak this last phrase without sobs and tears, which made this scene one of the most mournful sights ever witnessed by Bussy,—Bussy, the soldier, accustomed to shed and to see blood shed.

Jeanne, who was nearly in a swoon, also gazed at the count with a sort of terror.

"Oh, count!" cried Saint-Luc, "is it not horrible? You must abandon this infamous prince. A noble heart like yours cannot continue to be the friend of an assassin and a ravisher."

The old man, a little comforted by these words, awaited Bussy's answer before forming his opinion about that gentleman. Saint-Luc's sympathetic words comforted him. In the great moral crises physical weaknesses are great, and it is not the least alleviation to the pain of the child bitten by a favorite dog to see this dog beaten. But Bussy, instead of replying to Saint-Luc, took a step towards M. de Méridor.

"Monsieur le Baron," said he, "will you grant me the honor of a private interview?"

"Listen to M. de Bussy, dear Baron," said Jeanne; "you will see that he is good and can help his friends."

"Speak, monsieur," said the baron, trembling. He foresaw something strange from the young man's manner. Bussy turned towards Saint-Luc and his wife, and casting on them a glance full of nobility and friendship,—

"Do you permit me?" said he.

The young couple left the room leaning on each other, and doubly happy in their happiness in the face of such misfortune. When the door had closed behind them, Bussy approached the baron and with a deep bow,—

"Monsieur le baron," said he, "you have just accused, here in my presence, a prince whom I serve; and you have accused him with such violence that I am forced to ask for an explanation."

The old man started.

"Oh, do not mistake the wholly respectful meaning of my words! It is with the greatest sympathy that I speak to you, with the greatest desire to lessen your sorrows that I say to you: Monsieur le Baron, tell me in all its details the story of the catastrophe you were just now relating to Monsieur de Saint-Luc and his wife. Let me

know if all really took place as you think, and if all is really lost ? ”

“ Monsieur,” said the old man, “ I hoped for one moment. A noble and loyal gentleman, M. de Monsoreau, loved my poor daughter, and was interested in her.”

“ M. de Monsoreau ! Well,” said Bussy, “ what was his conduct in all this ? ”

“ Ah, his conduct was loyal and honorable, because Diane had refused his hand. Yet he was the first one to warn me of the duke’s infamous projects. He pointed out to me the way to make them fail. He asked but one thing if he saved my daughter, and that proved all the nobility and honor of his soul,—he asked me to give her to him in marriage if he succeeded in snatching her from the duke’s hands ; so that, alas ! my daughter is none the less lost. He, young, active, and enterprising, could defend her against a powerful prince,—a thing which her poor old father could not undertake to do. I joyfully gave my consent ; but, alas ! it was useless. He came too late, and found that my poor Diane had saved herself from dishonor by death.”

“ And since that fatal moment,” asked Bussy, “ have you heard from M. de Monsoreau ? ”

“ Only one month has elapsed since these events took place,” said the old man, “ and the poor count no doubt did not dare present himself before me, after having failed in his generous plan.”

Bussy bowed his head. All was made clear to him. He now understood how M. de Monsoreau had succeeded in carrying off from the prince the young girl whom he loved, and how the fear that the prince should discover that he had made her his wife had led him to allow the report of her death to be believed by all, even by her father.

“ Well, monsieur,” said the old man, seeing the young one’s head bowed in thought, while his eyes, which had flashed more than once during the course of the narrative, were fixed on the ground.

" Well, Monsieur le Baron," replied Bussy, " I am sent by Monseigneur the Duc d'Anjou to bring you to Paris, where his Highness wishes to speak to you."

" To speak to me ! " cried the baron. " I shall face this man after the death of my daughter ? . And what can this murderer have to tell me ? "

" Who knows ? Justify himself, perhaps."

" And if he should justify himself—" cried the old man. " No, Monsieur de Bussy, no ; I shall not go to Paris. It would be taking me too far away from the place where my child is resting in her cold, watery grave."

" Monsieur," said Bussy, in a firm voice, " permit me to insist ; it is my duty to conduct you to Paris. I have come only for that purpose."

" Well, I shall go to Paris, then," said the old man, trembling with anger ; " but woe to those who have worked my ruin. The king will hear me : and if he does not hear me, I will appeal to all the gentlemen of France. Then, too," he murmured, " I forgot in my sorrow that I hold in my hand a weapon of which I have not had to make use up to the present time. Yes, Monsieur de Bussy, I shall accompany you."

" And I, Monsieur le Baron," said Bussy, taking his hand, " I recommend you to have the patience, calmness, and dignity befitting a Christian nobleman. God has infinite mercies for all noble hearts ; and you do not know what he holds in reserve for you. I also beg you, while waiting the day when these mercies shall burst forth, not to count me among your enemies, as you do not know what I shall do for you. Farewell until to-morrow, Monsieur le Baron ; and if it please you, at break of day we shall set out."

" I consent," said the old nobleman, moved in spite of himself by the gentle tone in which Bussy had uttered these words ; " but in the meanwhile, friend or enemy, you are my guest, and I must conduct you to your apartment."

The baron took from the table a silver candlestick, and mounted with a heavy step the main staircase of the castle,

followed by Bussy. The dogs wished to follow him ; he stopped them by a sign. Two of his servants came behind Bussy, carrying torches.

On reaching the threshold of the room which was to be his, Bussy inquired what had become of M. de Saint-Luc and his wife.

“ My old Germain must have taken care of them,” replied the baron. “ A pleasant night to you, Monsieur le Comte.”

CHAPTER XXIV.

HOW RÉMY LE HAUDOIN HAD, IN BUSSY’S ABSENCE, ESTABLISHED MEANS OF COMMUNICATION WITH THE HOUSE OF THE RUE SAINT-ANTOINE.

MONSIEUR and Madame de Saint-Luc could not get over their surprise. Bussy had secrets with M. de Méridor. Bussy was preparing to set out for Paris with the old man. Finally, Bussy, taking the management of affairs which before had seemed utterly foreign and unknown to him, was a most inexplicable phenomenon for the two young people.

As for the baron, the magic power of the title Royal Highness had produced on him their ordinary effect,—a gentleman of the days of Henri III. had not yet come to scoff at titles and escutcheons.

Royal Highness meant for M. de Méridor, as for every one except the king, superior force,—that is, thunder and tempest.

When the morning came, the baron took leave of the guests he had settled in the castle ; but Saint-Luc and his wife, understanding the gravity of the situation, intended to leave Méridor as soon as possible, and to go to the estates of Brissac, which were very near, just as soon as they should have obtained the timid marshal’s consent.

As to Bussy, he needed but a second to justify his strange conduct. Bussy, master of his secret which he

ould reveal whenever he pleased, resembled one of those magicians dear to the Orientals, who at the first stroke of their wand cause tears to flow from every eye, and at the second, dry these tears and bring smiles to every lip.

This second, which sufficed for Bussy to effect such great changes, was used by him to murmur a few words in the charming ear that Madame de Saint-Luc turned towards him.

After these few words had been heard, Jeanne's face grew radiant. A lovely flush mounted to her brow. Her little white teeth were seen to appear like pearls between the coral of her lips ; and when her husband gazed at her with stupefaction, and was about to question her, she placed her finger on her lips and bounded away, throwing a kiss of thanks to Bussy.

The old man had seen nothing of this expressive pantomime. With his eyes fixed on his paternal manor, he mechanically caressed his dogs, which he could not make up his mind to leave. He gave some orders in a trembling voice to his servants, who bowed their heads before him. Then, assisted by his squire, he mounted with great difficulty an old piebald horse, of which he was very fond, and which had been his war-horse during the last civil wars. Then glancing once more at the Château de Méridor, he rode away without uttering another word. Bussy, whose eyes shone, returned Jeanne's smiles, and frequently turned round to bid his friends adieu. When he left, Jeanne had whispered to him,—

“ What a strange man you are, Monsieur le Comte ! I had told you that happiness awaited you at the Château de Méridor, when, on the contrary, it is you who bring back to Méridor the happiness that had flown away.”

From Méridor to Paris the way is long, particularly for an old baron riddled with sword thrusts and bullets received in those bloody wars where the wounds were in proportion to the warriors. Long, too, was the way for the piebald horse named Jarnac, and who, at the sound of his name, raised his head, while his eyes flashed proudly beneath his drooping eyelids.

Once on the road, Bussy set to work. This work consisted in winning over by filial attentions the old man's heart, in which he had first inspired hatred. And he no doubt succeeded ; for on the morning of the sixth day, as they neared Paris, M. de Méridor spoke to his companion these words, which explained the change wrought in his mind during this journey.

"It is very singular, count ; here I am, nearer my misfortune than ever, and yet I am less uneasy than I was when we started."

"Two hours yet, Seigneur Augustin," replied Bussy, "and you will have judged me as I wish to be judged by you."

The travellers entered Paris through the Faubourg Saint-Marcel, that eternal entrance the preference for which could be conceived at that period, because this horrible neighborhood—one of the ugliest of Paris—seemed the most Parisian of any, thanks to its numerous churches, its thousands of picturesque houses, and its little bridges over the sewers.

"Whither are we going ?" asked the baron ; "to the Louvre, no doubt?"

"Monsieur," said Bussy, "I must first take you to my *hôtel*, that you may rest for a few moments, and be in condition to see the person to whom I am conducting you."

The baron patiently allowed himself to be led. Bussy took him to his *hôtel* in the Rue Grenelle-Saint-Honoré. The count's attendants did not expect him, or rather no longer expected him. Having returned late at night through the little gate of which he alone possessed the key, he had saddled his horse himself, and had seen no one but Rémy le Haudoin. His sudden disappearance, coupled with the dangers to which he had been exposed the preceding week, as his wound had proved, his adventurous habits, which he would not amend,—all this led his people to think that he had fallen into some trap set by his enemies ; that fortune, which had served him so long, had finally grown weary ; and that Bussy, mut-

and invisible, had really died from a dagger or sword thrust.

His best friends and most faithful servants were already making *novenas* for his return to light, which appeared to them as uncertain as that of Pyrithous. Others, more positive, expected only to find his corpse, and already had instituted the most minute search in the sewers, auspicious cellars, the quarries of the suburbs, the bed of the Bièvre, the moat of the Bastille.

One single person answered all inquiries concerning Bussy in the following manner :—

“ Monsieur le Comte is in very good health.”

But if the questions went any further, as this person knew nothing more, all the information necessarily stopped here.

This person, who, thanks to his reassuring but brief answers, was greatly scoffed at, was Maître Rémy le Haudoin, who went about from night till morning, wasting his time in strange contemplations, disappearing from time to time, either in the morning or in the evening, and always returning with a ravenous appetite, and by his own cheerfulness bringing a little gayety into the house.

Le Haudoin, after one of these mysterious disappearances, returned to the *hôtel* just as the courtyard was filled with noise and acclamations, while the valets seized the bridle of Bussy’s horse, and fought for the honor of being his squire, as the count, instead of dismounting, remained seated on his horse.

“ Come,” said Bussy, “ you are satisfied to see me alive. Thank you. You ask me if it is really I. Look at me, touch me ; but be quick. Good ! Now help that worthy gentleman to dismount, and remember that I look upon him with more respect than I would a prince.”

Bussy was right to call attention to the old man, whose simple garments, not in the fashion of the day, and whose piebald horse had been quickly judged by men accustomed to exercise Bussy’s horses every day. They had been tempted to take him for some old, pensioned squire, whom the young man brought back from this exile in

the provinces as from another world. But after these words had been uttered, each one hastened to the baron. Le Haudoin watched this scene with a sly grin, as was his habit ; and it took all Bussy's gravity to make this smile disappear from the young doctor's merry face.

“ Quick ! a room for Monseigneur,” cried Bussy.

“ Which one ? ” immediately asked five or six eager voices.

“ The best one,—mine.”

And he now offered his arm to the old man to mount the stair, trying to receive him with even more honor than he had been received by him. M. de Méridor passively suffered this overwhelming courtesy, as we suffer the continuation of certain dreams which lead us to those fantastic countries, the kingdom of imagination and of night.

The golden goblet was brought to the count ; and he wished to pour out himself the wine of hospitality.

“ Thanks, thanks, monsieur,” said the old man ; “ but shall we soon go where we are going ? ”

“ Yes, Seigneur Augustin, very soon, I assure you and it will not only bring happiness to you, but to me.”

“ What do you mean, and why do you always speak to me in a manner that I do not understand ? ”

“ I say, Seigneur Augustin, that I have spoken to you of a Providence which is merciful to great hearts, and that we are approaching the moment when I shall appeal to this providence in your name.”

The baron looked at Bussy with astonishment ; but the latter, making him a sign which meant “ I shall soon return,” went out of the room with a smiling countenance.

As he expected, Le Haudoin was acting as sentinel outside of the door. He took the young man by the arm and drew him into his closet.

“ Well, my dear Æsculapius, how have we progressed ? ”

“ Where ? ”

“ In the Rue Saint-Antoine, of course.”

“ Monseigneur, the point is no doubt an interesting one for you ; there is nothing new.”

Bussy breathed.

"Has not the husband returned?" he asked.

"Yes, but with no success. It seems there is in all this father who is to make the *dénouement*, a god who will descend some morning in a machine. So they are expecting this absent father, this unknown god."

"Good!" said Bussy; "but how do you know all this?"

"Understand, monsieur," said Le Haudoin, with his frank, hearty laugh, "that your absence transformed my position near you into a momentary sinecure. I wished to employ the leisure you left me for your advantage."

"Come, what have you done? Tell me, Rémy; I am stinging."

"Well, after you were gone, I carried some money, some books, and a sword to a little room that I had rented in the house on the corner of the Rue Saint-Antoine and the Rue Sainte-Catherine."

"Well?"

"From that point I could watch the house you know, from the attic to the cellar."

"Very well?"

"Hardly had I taken possession of my room than I placed myself at a window."

"Excellent!"

"Yes; but there was nevertheless one drawback to his excellence."

"What was it?"

"If I could see, I could also be seen, and after all, they might take umbrage at a man whose gaze was always directed to the same object. After two or three days, such obstinacy would have made me pass for a thief, a lover, a spy, or a madman."

"Powerfully reasoned, my dear Le Haudoin. But what did you then do?"

"Oh, then, Monsieur le Comte, I saw that I must have recourse to violent measures, and—"

"And what?"

"Well, I fell in love."

“ Hey ? ” said Bussy, who did not understand how Rémy’s love could serve him.

“ As I had the honor of telling you,” gravely repeated the young doctor, “ I fell madly, wildly in love.”

“ With whom ? ”

“ With Gertrude.”

“ With Gertrude, Madame de Monsoreau’s maid ? ”

“ Eh, *mon Dieu* ! Yes, with Gertrude, Madame de Monsoreau’s maid. What will you have, monseigneur ? I am not a gentleman, to fall in love with ladies. I am but a poor little doctor, with no other practice beyond one client, who, I hope, will only give me occupations few and far between ; and I must make my experiments *in anima vili*, as we say at the Sorbonne.”

“ Poor Rémy,” said Bussy, “ believe that I appreciate your devotion.”

“ Well, monseigneur,” replied Le Haudoin, “ I am not so much to be pitied after all. Gertrude is a fine large girl, two inches taller than I, and who could pick me up at arm’s length by my coat-collar. That is the result of a great development of the muscles of the biceps and of the deltoid. As this inspires me with a very flattering veneration for her, and as I always yield to her, we never quarrel. Then she has a wonderful talent.”

“ What is it, my poor Rémy ? ”

“ She relates delightfully.”

“ Ah, really ? ”

“ Yes ; so that through her I know all that takes place at her mistress’s. Well, what do you say to that ? I thought you would not object to having intelligence of the house.”

“ Le Haudoin, you are the good genius that chance, or rather Providence, has sent to me. So you and Gertrude are on terms of— ? ”

“ *Puella me diligit*,” replied Le Haudoin, drawing himself up with affected vanity.

“ And you are received in the house ? ”

“ I entered last night, at twelve o’clock, through the famous wicket door that you know so well.”

" And how did you attain this happiness ? "

" Well, quite naturally, I must say."

" Well, how ? "

" Two days after your departure, on the day following the one on which I had taken possession of my little room, I waited at the door until the lady of my future dreams should go out for her marketing,—a duty to which she attends every day between eight and nine in the morning. At ten minutes after eight, I saw her appear. I immediately left my observatory and placed myself in her way."

" And she recognized you ? "

" She recognized me so well that she gave one shriek and ran away."

" Then ? "

" Then I ran after her, and caught her with great difficulty, as she runs very fast ; but, you understand, skirts are always a little in the way.

" ' Jesus ! ' she cried.

" ' Holy Virgin ! ' I cried.

" This gave her a good opinion of me. Another man less pious than I would have cried *morbleu* or *corbleu*.

" ' The physician,' said she.

" ' The charming maid,' I replied. She smiled, but immediately changed her manner.

" ' You are mistaken, monsieur,' said she. ' I do not know you.'

" ' But I know you,' said I. ' For the past three days have not lived, I have not existed. I adore you to such point that I no longer live in the Rue Beaufreillis, but Rue Saint-Antoine, at the corner of the Rue Sainte-Catherine ; and I have only moved there to be able to see you go in and out. If you still have need of me to nurse and some young men, you must not come to seek me at my old lodgings, but at my new ones.'

" ' Silence ! ' said she.

" ' Ah, you see,' I replied.

" And this is how we became acquainted,—or rather, renewed our acquaintance."

" So that you are now—"

" As happy as a lover can be with Gertrude ; but everything is relative. I am more than happy,—I am at the height of felicity,—since I have reached the point I wished to attain in your interest."

" But she will perhaps suspect ? "

" Nothing. I have not even spoken of you. Does poor Rémy le Haudois know noble gentlemen like the Lord of Bussy ? No ; I only asked in a careless way, ' Is your young master better ? '

" ' What young master ? '

" ' The one whose wounds I dressed.'

" ' He is not my young master,' she replied

" ' Ah, as he was lying in your mistress's bed, thought—' said I.

" ' Oh, *mon Dieu* ! no ; poor young man ! ' said she with a sigh. ' He was nothing to us, and we have only seen him once since then.'

" ' So you do not even know his name ? ' I asked

" ' Oh, yes ! '

" ' You might have known it and forgotten it.'

" ' It is a name not easily forgotten.'

" ' What is it, then ? '

" ' Have you sometimes heard of the Lord of Bussy ? '

" ' *Parbleu* ! ' I replied ; ' Bussy, the brave Bussy ? '

" ' Well, that was he.'

" ' Then the lady ? '

" ' My mistress is married, monsieur.'

" ' One may be married and faithful, and yet think of handsome young man, even if seen only for an instant particularly if this young man were wounded, interesting and lying in one's bed.'

" ' Well,' replied Gertrude, ' to be candid, I shall not say that my mistress does not think of him.'

A bright flush rose to Bussy's brow.

" ' We even speak of him whenever we are alone,' she continued."

" ' Excellent girl ! ' cried the count.

" ' What do you say about him ? ' I asked

" ' I relate his brave deeds ; and that is not difficult

for all Paris is ringing with the blows that he gives and receives. I have even taught my mistress a little song which is very popular.'

" ' Ah, I know it ! ' I replied ; ' is it not,—

" *Un beau chercheur de noise,*
C'est le Seigneur d'Amboise,
Tendre et fidèle aussi,
C'est Monseigneur Bussy."

" ' Exactly ! ' cried Gertrude. ' So now my mistress sings nothing else.' "

Bussy pressed the young doctor's hand. An indescribable thrill of happiness had just passed through him.

" Is this all ? " he asked ; man is so insatiable in his desires.

" Yes, monseigneur. Oh, I shall know more later on ; but, the devil ! one cannot learn everything in one day, or rather in one night."

CHAPTER XXV.

THE FATHER AND DAUGHTER.

HIS report made Bussy very happy ; he learned two things, in fact. To begin with, M. de Monsoreau was still alive, and he, Bussy, was already loved. Then this young man's great friendship for him gladdened his heart. There is in all sentiments that come from heaven an expansion of our whole being which seems to double our faculties. We feel happy because we feel that we are good.

Bussy understood that there was no more time to lose now, and that each thrill of sorrow that went to this old baron's heart was almost a sacrilege. There is such an upheaval of all the laws of nature in a man who weeps for his daughter, that the one who, with one word, can console this father, deserves the curses of all fathers if he does not do so.

When he descended into the courtyard, M. de Méridor found a fresh horse which Bussy had had saddled for him another horse awaited Bussy. Both having mounted they set off, accompanied by Rémy.

They reached the Rue Saint-Antoine, to the great astonishment of M. de Méridor, who had not been to Paris within the last twenty years, and who found it greatly changed since the days of King Henri II., on account of the much more frequent passage of horses, coaches, and lackeys. But in spite of this astonishment, which verged on admiration, the baron was none the less a prey to sadness, which increased as he neared the unknown end of his journey. How would the duke receive him, and what would come out of the new wounds opened by this interview ? Then, from time to time, he looked at Bussy with astonishment, and asked himself by what strange chance he had come to follow so blindly the follower of the prince to whom he owed all his misery. Would it not have been much more in keeping with his dignity to brave the Duc d'Anjou, instead of thus accompanying Bussy wherever the latter would choose to lead him, of going straight to the Louvre and throwing himself at the king's feet ? What could the prince say to him ? How could he console him ? Was he not one of those who apply soft words to the wound they have made ? But we are no sooner out of their presence than the wound flows more quickly and is more painful than before.

They came in this way to the Rue Saint-Paul. Bussy, a clever captain, had sent Rémy in advance, with orders to prepare the way. The latter addressed himself to Gertrude, and returned to tell his patron that there were neither hat nor sword in the alley, the corridor, or the stair leading to Madame de Monsoreau's room. All these consultations between Bussy and Le Haudoin took place in a low voice, as may well be imagined.

During this time the baron looked about him in astonishment.

“ And is this the Duc d'Anjou's dwelling ? ” he asked.

A feeling of suspicion rose within him at the humble aspect of the house.

"Not exactly, monsieur," replied Bussy, with a smile; "but if it is not his house, it is that of a lady whom he loved."

The old gentleman's brow became clouded.

"Monsieur," said he, stopping his horse, "we people from the provinces are not accustomed to such things. The loose manners of Paris frighten us so much that we cannot live in presence of your mysteries. It seems to me that if M. le Duc d'Anjou wishes to see M. de Méridor, it should be in his own palace, and not in the house of one of his mistresses. And then," added the old man, with a deep sigh, "why do you, who seem a man of honor, bring me to see one of these women? Is it to make me understand that my poor Diane would still be living if, like the mistress of this house, she had preferred shame to death?"

"Come, come, Monsieur le Baron," said Bussy, with that loyal smile which had always been his most potent charm to convince the old gentleman. "Do not make any false conjectures beforehand. Upon my honor as a gentleman, you will not find here what you think. The lady whom you are going to see is most virtuous, and worthy of all respect."

"But who is she, then?"

"She is—she is the wife of a gentleman of your acquaintance."

"In truth? But then, monsieur, how do you know that the prince has loved her?"

"Because I always speak the truth, Monsieur le Baron. Enter, and you will judge for yourself when you see the realization of what I promised you."

"Take care! I was mourning for my cherished child, and you said to me, 'Console yourself, monsieur; the mercies of God are great.' By promising consolation to my sorrows you nearly promised a miracle."

"Enter, monsieur," repeated Bussy, with that same smile that always charmed the old man.

The baron alighted. Gertrude, who had rushed to the

threshold in amazement, looked from Le Haudoin and Bussy to the old man, and could not guess what strange dispensation of Providence had united these three men.

"Tell Madame de Monsoreau that M. de Bussy has returned and wishes to see her at once," said the count. "But if you value your soul," he added in a low voice, "do not say a word about the person who accompanies me."

"Madame de Monsoreau!" said the baron, dumb-founded, "Madame de Monsoreau!"

"Pass in, Monsieur le Baron," said Bussy, pushing Seigneur Augustin into the alley. Then, while the old man ascended the stairs with a tottering step, Diane's voice was heard to reply with a strange tremulousness:

"M. de Bussy, you say, Gertrude? M. de Bussy? Well, let him come in."

"That voice!" cried the baron, stopping suddenly midway up the stairs. "That voice! Oh, *mon Dieu! mon Dieu!*"

"Go up, Monsieur le Baron," said Bussy.

But at the same moment, just as the baron tremblingly sought the railing and looked about him, Diane appeared at the head of the stairs, bathed in a flood of golden sunshine, more beautiful than ever, and smiling, though she did not expect to see her father.

At this sight, which he took for some magic vision, the old man uttered a terrible cry, and with arms extended and haggard eyes, offered such a complete image of terror and delirium that Diane, ready to throw herself into his arms, stopped with surprise and fright. The baron extended his hand, and finding Bussy's shoulder within reach, leaned upon it.

"Diane alive!" murmured the Baron de Méridon. "Diane! my Diane whom I believed dead! Oh, *mon Dieu!*"

And this strong warrior, this vigorous actor in the foreign and civil wars, which had always spared him, this old oak-tree whom the shock of Diane's death had left standing, this athlete who had struggled so powerfully

against sorrow, crushed, broken, annihilated by joy, moved backwards with trembling knees, and, without Bussy, would have fallen from the top of the stairs at the sight of this adored vision which whirled divided into confused atoms before his eyes.

"*Mon Dieu ! M. de Bussy,*" cried Diane, rushing down the few steps that separated her from the old man, "what is the matter with my father ?"

The young woman, frightened by this sudden pallor and the strange effect produced by an interview which she thought announced, questioned with her eyes even more than with her voice.

"M. le Baron de Méridor believed you to be dead, and mourned for you, madame, as such a father should mourn for such a daughter."

"What !" cried Diane, "and no one had undeceived him ?"

"No one."

"Oh, no ! no one !" cried the old man, recovering from his momentary prostration ; "no one ! not even M. de Bussy."

"Ungrateful one !" said that gentleman, in a tone of gentle reproach.

"Oh, yes," replied the old man ; "yes, you are right. This instant repays me for all my sorrows. Oh, my Diane, my darling Diane !" he continued, drawing his daughter's head to his lips with one hand, and holding out the other to Bussy.

Then suddenly raising his head, as if some painful memory or new fear had penetrated to his very heart, in spite of the armor of joy, if we may so speak,—

"But what did you mean, M. de Bussy, by telling me that I was to see Madame de Monsoreau ? Where is he ?"

"Alas, father !" murmured Diane. Bussy's whole frame shook.

"You see her before you," said he ; "and the Comte de Monsoreau is your son-in-law."

"What !" stammered the old man, "M. de Mon-

soreau is my son-in-law, and every one, even you, Diane, left me in ignorance of the fact ? ”

“ I was afraid to write to you, father, lest my letter should fall into the prince’s hands. Besides, I thought you knew everything.”

“ But what could be the object ? ” asked the old man.

“ Why all these strange mysteries ? ”

“ Oh, yes, father, think of it ! ” cried Diane. “ Why did M. de Monsoreau let you believe that I was dead ? Why did he leave you in ignorance of the fact that he was my husband ? ”

The baron, trembling to sound these mysterious depths, timidly questioned his daughter’s sparkling eyes and Bussy’s intelligent melancholy. In the meantime they had reached the drawing-room.

“ M. de Monsoreau, my son-in-law ! ” still stammered the Baron de Méridor, completely crushed.

“ That should not surprise you,” answered Diane, in a tone of gentle reproach. “ Had you not commanded me to marry him ? ”

“ Yes, if he saved you.”

“ Well, he saved me,” she said in a low voice. “ He saved me, if not from misfortune, at least from shame.”

“ Then why did he let me believe you dead,—I who mourned so bitterly for you ? ” repeated the old man.

“ Why did he leave me to die of despair, when one word, one single word, could restore me to life ? ”

“ Oh, there must be some other snare beneath all this ! ” cried Diane. “ Father, you must not leave me, and M. de Bussy will protect us.”

“ Alas ! madame,” said the young man, bowing, “ it is no longer my duty to penetrate your family secrets. Seeing your husband’s strange actions, I was obliged to find for you an acknowledged protector. This protector I brought from Méridor. You are near your father. I shall retire.”

“ He is right,” replied the old man, with sadness. “ M. de Monsoreau feared the Duc d’Anjou’s anger. M. de Bussy also fears it.”

Diane gave the young man a glance that meant, " You, who are called the brave Bussy, do you fear M. le Duc d'Anjou as M. de Monsoreau might fear him ? "

Bussy understood Diane's look, and smiled.

" Monsieur le Baron," said he, " forgive me, I pray you, for the strange question I am about to ask ; and you, madame, will excuse me, I hope, for the sake of the service I wish to render you."

Both looked at Bussy and waited.

" Monsieur le Baron," resumed the latter, " I beg you to ask Madame de Monsoreau—"

He laid particular stress on these last words, which made Diane's cheek turn pale. Bussy saw that he had given her pain, and resumed,—

" Ask your daughter if she is happy in this marriage which you had ordered, and to which she consented."

Diane clasped her hands and sobbed. This was the only answer she could give Bussy. It is true that no other would have been so positive. The baron's eyes filled with tears as he began to see that his rather too hasty friendship for M. de Monsoreau would be the source of great unhappiness to his daughter.

" Now," said Bussy, " it is therefore true, monsieur, that without being forced to it by cunning or violence, you gave your daughter's hand to M. de Monsoreau ? "

" Yes, if he saved her."

" And he did save her. Then there is no need for me to ask if you intend to keep the word you pledged."

" That is a law for all, and particularly for gentlemen ; and you, monsieur, should know it better than any. M. de Monsoreau has saved my daughter according to her own statement. My daughter therefore belongs to him."

" Ah," murmured the young woman, " would that I were dead ! "

" Madame," said Bussy, " you see I was right in saying that there is nothing more for me to do here. Monsieur le Baron gives you to M. de Monsoreau, and you yourself

promised to give yourself to him if you could see your father again."

"Ah, do not tear my heart, M. de Bussy!" cried Madame de Monsoreau, going up to the young man; "my father does not know that I fear this man; my father does not know that I hate him. He persists in seeing a savior in him, while I,—I who am enlightened by instinct,—I persist in saying that this man is my tormentor."

"Diane, Diane," cried the baron, "he saved you!"

"Yes," cried Bussy, drawn beyond the limits wherein his prudence and delicacy had hitherto held him, "yes; but supposing the danger were less great than you believed, supposing this danger were fictitious, supposing—I know not what. Listen, baron: there is beneath all this some mystery which I must and will solve. But I protest that if I had had the happiness to find myself in M. de Monsoreau's place, I too would have saved your beautiful and innocent daughter from dishonor; but by the God in heaven who hears me, I would not have made her pay for this service."

"He loved her," said M. de Méridor, who himself felt how odious M. de Monsoreau's conduct had been; "and we must forgive love."

"And I," cried Bussy, "do I not—"

But frightened by the avowal which was about to escape from his heart, Bussy stopped, and the flash from his eyes completed better than words could have done the meaning of his phrase.

Diane understood, and perhaps better than if it had been spoken:

"Well," she said with a blush, "you have understood me, have you not? Well, my friend, my brother,—you have claimed these two titles, and I give them to you,—well, my friend and brother, can you do something for me?"

"But the Duc d'Anjou! the Duc d'Anjou!" murmured the old man, who always saw before him the threatening danger of royal anger.

"I am not of those who fear the anger of princes, Seigneur Augustin," replied the young man; "and I am either very much mistaken, or we shall have no cause to fear this anger. If you will let me, M. de Méridor, I shall make you such a friend of the Duc d'Anjou that he will protect you from M. de Monsoreau, from whom comes the real danger,—an unknown but certain danger, invisible but perhaps inevitable."

"But if the duke learn that Diane is still alive, all will be lost," said the old man.

"Come," said Bussy, "I see that in spite of all I have said, you still believe in M. de Monsoreau more than you do in me. Let us speak no more of it. Reject my offer, Monsieur le Baron, reject the all-powerful aid I was about to call to help you. Throw yourself into the arms of the man who has so well justified your confidence. I have spoken, my task is done, and there is nothing more for me to do here. Adieu, Seigneur Augustin! Adieu, madame. You shall see me no more; I retire."

"Oh!" cried Diane, seizing the young man's hand. "Have I weakened for one instant? Have I returned to you? No! On my knees, I implore you not to abandon me."

Bussy clasped Diane's beautiful, pleading hands, and his anger fell as falls the snow that melts on the mountain-tops beneath the warm sun of May.

"Since you ask me," said Bussy, "very well, madame. Yes, I accept the holy mission you have intrusted to me, and within three days,—for I must have the time to join the Duc d'Anjou, who has accompanied the king on a pilgrimage to Chartres,—within three days you will see something new, or may I lose my name of Bussy."

Then approaching, with an intoxication that made his eyes flash fire,

"We are allied against Monsoreau," he whispered to her. "Remember that it was not he who brought back our father, and do not be false to me."

And pressing the baron's hand for the last time, he rushed from the room.

CHAPTER XXVI.

HOW BROTHER GORENFLOT AWOKE, AND OF THE WELCOME
HE MET WITH AT HIS CONVENT.

WE had left our friend Chicot in ecstasy before the uninterrupted sleep and the no less splendid snoring of Brother Gorenfot. He made a sign to the innkeeper to retire and carry away the light, after having strictly enjoined him not to say a word to the worthy brother about his having gone out at ten o'clock at night, and returned only at three o'clock in the morning.

As Maître Bonhomet had noticed one thing,—that in all the relations between the monk and the jester, it was always the jester who paid,—he held the jester in high esteem, whereas he had, on the contrary, very little veneration for the monk.

He therefore promised Chicot that under no consideration would he open his mouth about the events of the night before, and retired, leaving the two friends in the dark, as he had been instructed to do.

Chicot soon perceived a thing which excited his admiration. This was that Brother Gorenfot snored and spoke at the same time. This did not indicate, as we might believe, a conscience torn with remorse, but a stomach overfilled with food. The words uttered by Gorenfot in his sleep, when added to each other, formed a horrible mixture of sacred eloquence and bacchic maxims.

However, Chicot perceived that if he remained in utter darkness he would have some difficulty in effecting his restitution in such a manner that Gorenfot, on awaking, should suspect nothing. He might, in fact, in the darkness, tread on one of the monk's four limbs, which lay in directions unknown to him; and the pain might draw him from his lethargy. Chicot therefore blew upon the embers to throw some glimmer of light upon the scene.

At the noise of this breath, Gorenfot ceased to snore and murmured,—

" Brethren, this is a most ferocious wind; it is the breath of the Lord, and this breath inspires me."

Then he began to snore again. Chicot waited for an instant until sleep had resumed its sway, and began to unwrap the monk.

" Br-r-r-r-ou ! " said Gorenflot. " How cold ! That will keep the grapes from ripening."

Chicot stopped in the midst of his operation, which he resumed a moment later.

" You know my zeal, brethren," continued the monk, " for the Church, and for Monseigneur le Duc de Guise."

" Rascal ! " said Chicot.

" Here is my opinion," said Gorenflot; " but it is certain—"

" What is certain ? " asked Chicot, raising the monk to slip on his robe.

" It is certain that man is stronger than wine. Brother Gorenflot fought against the wine like Jacob against the angel, and Brother Gorenflot conquered the wine."

Chicot shrugged his shoulders. This sudden movement caused the monk to open his eyes, and above him he saw Chicot's smile, which seemed livid and sinister in that uncertain light.

" Ah, no phantoms, no goblins ! " said the monk, as though he were complaining to some familiar demon who forgot the compact made between them.

" He is dead drunk," said Chicot, as he rolled Gorenflot in his robe, and brought the cowl over his head.

" Ah, that is good ! " grumbled the monk; " the exton has closed the chancel door, and the wind no longer blows in."

" Wake up now, if you choose," said Chicot. " I don't care."

" The Lord has heard my prayer," murmured the monk, and the wind which he had sent to freeze the vines has hanged into a gentle zephyr."

" Amen ! " said Chicot, and making a pillow of the napkins and a sheet of the table-cloth, he went to sleep by the side of his companion, after having arranged

the empty bottles and dirty plates the best way he could.

The bright daylight shining in his eyes, and the host's shrill voice in the kitchen scolding the scullions, succeeded in penetrating through the thick mists that clouded Gorenflot's thoughts. He raised himself up, and with the aid of his two hands, succeeded in establishing himself on that portion of his anatomy which Nature has given to man to be his principal centre of gravity.

Having, not without difficulty, accomplished this feat Gorenflot began to consider the significant confusion of the crockery, then Chicot, who, thanks to the graceful curve of one of his elbows, did not lose a single one of the monk's movements. Chicot pretended to snore in a manner that reflected great credit on the powers of imitation of which we have already spoken.

"Broad daylight!" cried the monk; "*corbleu!* broad daylight! It seems I have spent the night here."

Then, collecting his thoughts,—

"And the abbey!" said he. "Oh, oh!"

He began to tie the cords of his robe,—a detail to which Chicot had not attended.

"All the same," said he, "I had a strange dream. I thought I was dead, and wrapped up in a shroud stained with blood."

Gorenflot was not entirely mistaken. When he had waked up, he had taken the table-cloth for a shroud, and the wine-stains for blood-stains.

"Luckily it was a dream," said Gorenflot, looking again about him. During this survey his eyes rested on Chicot who, feeling himself under observation, snored with renewed vigor.

"What a fine sight is a drunken man!" said Gorenflot, gazing at Chicot with admiration. "How lucky he is to sleep so! Ah, but he is not in my position!" he added.

And he gave a sigh which rose to the pitch of Chicot's snores, so that the sigh would probably have waked up the Gascon had he been really asleep.

"What if I woke him up to ask his advice," said the monk ; "he is a man of good counsel."

Chicot tripled the dose ; and his snores, which had before reached the pitch of the organ, now became an imitation of thunder.

"No," resumed Gorenflot, "that would give him too many advantages over me. I shall find a good lie without him. But whatever may be the lie," continued the monk, "I shall find it very difficult to escape the dungeon. It is not the confinement that frightens me, it is the bread-and-water diet which results from it. If, at least, I had a little money to bribe the brother jailer—"

Chicot, having heard this, gently drew from his pocket a well-filled purse, which he hid under his body. This was not a useless precaution. More contrite than ever, Gorenflot approached his friend, and murmured these melancholy words,—

"If he were awake, he would not refuse me a crown ; but his sleep is sacred to me—and I shall take it."

At these words Brother Gorenflot, who had been sitting up all this time, knelt down, and leaning over Chicot, leftly searched the sleeper's pocket.

Chicot, in spite of the example which had been given him, did not judge it expedient to call on his familiar lemon, so he let Gorenflot search both pockets of his doublet.

"This is singular !" said the monk. "Nothing in his pockets. Ah, it may be in his hat !"

While the monk was examining the hat, Chicot poured the contents of his purse into his hand, and replaced it flat and empty in his hose pocket.

"Nothing in the hat ?" said the monk. "I am surprised ; for my friend Chicot is a jester full of reason, and never goes out without money. Ah, the scamp !" he added, with a broad smile, which stretched his mouth from ear to ear, "I forgot your breeches ;" and slipping his hand into Chicot's hose, he drew out the empty purse.

"Jesus !" he murmured ; "and who will pay the bill ?"

This thought produced a powerful effect on the monk. He immediately got on his legs, and with a rapid, if somewhat unsteady step, he made for the door, passed through the kitchen without entering into conversation with his host, in spite of the latter's advances, and fled.

Then Chicot replaced the money in the purse, and the purse in his pocket, and leaning on the window in a ray of sunshine, he forgot Gorenflot in a deep meditation.

However, the worthy monk, with his wallet on his shoulder, continued his way with that composed expression which the passers-by might mistake for meditation, but which was in reality nothing but preoccupation. Gorenflot was in search of one of those good lies used by the monk on a spree or the belated soldier. The main fact is always the same, while the details may be made more elaborate according to the liar's imagination. But he had hardly entered the Rue Saint-Jacques, when the great movement operated by the brothers at the very moment when they perceived him, gave him the most dreadful feeling of terror he had ever experienced in his whole life.

"They are speaking of me," said he. "They are pointing to me, waiting for me. They looked for me last night; my absence caused a scandal. I am lost!"

His head swam. A mad idea of flight flashed through his brain; but several monks came forward to meet him. He was undoubtedly pursued. Brother Gorenflot did justice to himself. He was not cut out for flight. He would soon be caught, bound, and dragged to the convent. He preferred resignation. He therefore advanced dejectedly towards his companions, who seemed to hesitate to come and speak to him.

"Alas!" said Gorenflot; "they even pretend not to know me. I am a stumbling-block,"

Finally one of them, bolder than the rest, went up to Gorenflot,

"Poor, dear brother!" said he.

Gorenflot sighed, and rolled up his eyes.

" You know that the prior is waiting for you," said another.

" Ah, *mon Dieu !*"

" Oh, *mon Dieu !* yes ; " added a third. " He said that you should be brought to him as soon as you returned to the convent."

" This is what I feared," said Gorenflot ; and more dead than alive, he entered the convent, the ponderous door of which closed behind him.

" Ah, it is you ! " cried the brother doorkeeper. " Come quick, quick ! the reverend prior, Joseph Foulon, is asking for you." And taking Gorenflot by the hand, he conducted him, or rather dragged him, to the prior's chamber. There, too, all the doors were closed behind him.

Gorenflot looked down, fearing to meet the prior's angry glance. He felt alone, abandoned by all, during an interview with his superior, who was irritated against him, and with very good cause.

" Ah, here you are at last ! " said the abbot.

" Reverend Father—" stammered the monk.

" What uneasiness you have caused us ! " said the prior.

" You are really too good, Father," resumed Gorenflot, who did not understand this indulgent tone, which he did not expect.

" You were afraid to return after last night's scene, were you not ? "

" I confess that I did not dare return," said the monk, while the cold perspiration gathered on his brow.

" Ah, dear brother ! dear brother ! " said the abbot ; " you did something very imprudent and bold."

" Let me explain to you, Father."

" What have you to explain ? Your outburst—"

" I need not explain," said Gorenflot ; " so much the better, as I found it very embarrassing to do so."

" I understood perfectly. A moment of exaltation, of enthusiasm, carried you off. Exaltation is a holy virtue, enthusiasm is a sacred feeling ; but virtues become vices

if carried to excess. The most honorable sentiments are reprehensible if exaggerated."

"Pardon me, holy Father," said Gorenflot; "but if you understand, I do not. Of what outburst do you speak?"

"Of the one you made last night."

"Out of the convent?" timidly asked the monk.

"Not at all; in the convent."

"I made an outburst in the convent?"

"Yes, you!"

Gorenflot scratched his nose. He began to understand that they were playing at cross purposes.

"I am as good a Catholic as you, yet your boldness frightened me."

"My boldness!" said Gorenflot; "was I very bold?"

"More than bold, my son; it was temerity."

"Alas! you must forgive a still uncurbed temper. I shall amend, good Father."

"Yes; but in the meanwhile I cannot help fearing the consequences for you and for us. If the thing had taken place in our presence alone, it would not matter."

"What!" said Gorenflot, "is it known outside?"

"No doubt. You know there were present more than a hundred laymen who did not lose a word of your speech."

"Of my speech!" said Gorenflot, more and more astonished.

"I acknowledge that it was fine, and that the applause must have intoxicated you, that the unanimous assent must have turned your head. But that it should go so far as to propose a procession through the streets of Paris, offering to wear a cuirass, and make an appeal to all good Catholics, with helmet and musket,—you will admit that this is going a little too far."

Gorenflot looked at the prior, and every shade of surprise was reflected in his eyes.

"Now," continued the abbot, "there is a way of conciliating everything. This religious fervor, now bubbling in your heart, would be hurtful to you in Paris, where so

many evil-thinking ones are watching you. I desire that you should go and spend it—”

“ Where, good Father ? ” asked Gorenflot, convinced that he would be sent to the dungeon.

“ In the provinces.”

“ An exile ? ” cried Gorenflot.

“ By remaining here something much worse might happen to you, dearly beloved brother.”

“ And what can happen to me ? ”

“ A criminal lawsuit, which would in all probability bring imprisonment for life, if not death.”

Gorenflot turned deadly pale. He could not understand how he ran the risk of suffering imprisonment for life, and even the penalty of death, for having become intoxicated in a tavern, and having spent a night out of the convent.

“ While submitting to this temporary exile, my dear brother, not only do you escape the danger, but you also plant the standard of faith in the provinces. What you said and did last night is dangerous and even impossible beneath the eyes of the king and his accursed favorites ; but in the provinces it becomes easier to execute. Set out at once, Brother Gorenflot. It may be already too late, and the archers may have received orders to arrest you.”

“ What are you saying, Reverend Father ? ” stammered the monk, as he rolled his eyes about in terror. As the prior, whose gentleness had first surprised him, spoke on, he was astonished at the proportions attained by a sin, which was, after all, very trifling. “ The archers, you say ? And what have I to do with the archers ? ”

“ You have nothing to do with them ; but they might have something to do with you.”

“ But have I been denounced ? ” asked Brother Gorenflot.

“ I would wager it. Depart ! depart ! ”

“ Depart, Reverend Father ! ” said Gorenflot, stupefied ; “ that is very easy to say. But how shall I live after I leave here ? ”

“ Eh ! nothing is easier. You beg for the convent ;

there is a means of existence. By begging you have hitherto fed others ; you will now feed yourself in that way. Then be assured that the system you have developed will give you enough partisans in the province for me to have the certainty that you shall not want for anything. But go ! for God's sake, go ! and do not return until you are summoned."

And the prior, after having tenderly embraced Gorenflot, pushed him gently but firmly to the door of his cell.

There all the convent was assembled, awaiting Brother Gorenflot. No sooner had he appeared than all rushed to him and each one wished to touch his hands, his neck, his clothes. Some even carried veneration so far as to kiss the hem of his gown.

"Adieu!" said one, pressing him to his heart ; "adieu you are a holy man ; do not forget me in your prayers."

"Bah!" said Gorenflot ; "am I a holy man ? Well ?

"Adieu, brave champion of the faith !" said another, pressing his hand. "Adieu ! Godfrey de Bouillon was nothing compared to you."

"Adieu, martyr !" said the third one, kissing the end of his cord ; "blindness still dwells among us, but the hour of light will come."

Gorenflot found himself carried thus from arm to arm, from embrace to embrace, and from epithets to epithets, as far as the street door, which closed behind him so soon as he had crossed the threshold. Gorenflot looked at that door with an expression which nothing could render, and finally went out of Paris, walking backwards, as if the avenging angel had showed him the point of his flaming sword.

The only thing he said as he passed the gate was,—

"The devil take me ! they are all mad. If not Heaven help me, it is I who am mad !"

CHAPTER XXVII.

HOW BROTHER GORENFLOT REMAINED CONVINCED THAT HE WAS A SOMNAMBULIST, AND BITTERLY DEPLORED THIS INFIRMITY.

UNTIL the fatal day we have now reached,—the day on which this unexpected persecution fell upon the poor monk,—Brother Gorenflot had led a contemplative life, going out early when he wished to breathe the fresh air, later when he wished to enjoy the sunshine. Trusting in God, and in the kitchen of the abbey, he had never thought of procuring for himself anything beyond the other worldly, and, after all, rare extras of the Corne 'Abondance. These extras were dependent on the aprices of the faithful, and could only be taken from the gifts in money, which Gorenflot compelled to halt as he passed the Rue Saint-Jacques. After these halts, the gifts entered the convent, diminished by the sum left on the way. There was also his friend Chicot, who liked good dinners and boon companions. But Chicot was most irregular in his habits. The monk sometimes saw him five or six days in succession, then would go three weeks, a month, or six weeks, without seeing the jester, who either remained with the king, or accompanied him in one of his pilgrimages, or else went on a business or pleasure trip for himself. Gorenflot was therefore one of those monks for whom, as for certain soldiers, the world began with the superior of the house,—that is to say, the colonel of the convent,—and ended with the empty pot. Therefore this soldier of the Church had never imagined that the day would come when he would be forced to set out in quest of adventures. If he had even had some money; but the prior's answer to his request had been simple and devoid of apostolic ornament, like that fragment from Saint Luke: “ Seek, and thou shalt find.”

Gorenflot, as he reflected that he would be

obliged to go and seek far away, felt weary before beginning.

However, the first thing to be done was to save himself from the danger which threatened him,—an unknown but pressing danger, judging from the words of his superior.

The poor monk was not one of those who can disguise their physique, and escape detection by some clever metamorphosis. He therefore resolved to get as far away as possible, and with this resolution, rapidly passed the Porte Bordelle, and went carefully by the sentinel and Swiss guards, fearing that the archers mentioned by the abbot of Sainte-Genevieve might prove to be only tangible realities.

But once in the open air, once in the country, five hundred feet beyond the city walls, when he saw on the roadside that first green grass of spring that shows itself above ground ; when he saw the glorious sun above the horizon, solitude extending right and left, and the murmuring city behind him, he seated himself on the edge of a ditch, and resting his double chin in his large, fat hand, scratched the end of his square nose with his forefinger, and began a reverie accompanied by groans.

With the exception of the cythara, which was lacking, Gorenflot resembled one of those Hebrews who, hanging their harp on the weeping willow-tree, furnished in the time of the famous desolation of Jerusalem, the text for the famous verse, “*Super flumina Babylonis*,” and the subject of a myriad of melancholy pictures.

Gorenflot groaned all the more that nine o’clock was approaching, and that was the dinner hour at the convent. The monks were behindhand in civilization as befits men detached from all things mundane, and in the year of grace 1578, followed the habits of the good king Charles V., who dined at eight o’clock in the morning, after his mass.

It would be as useless to enumerate all the ideas that came into Gorenflot’s mind as he sat hungrily thinking to count the grains of sand blown about on the seashore on a windy day.

The first idea, and the most difficult one to get rid of, we must confess, was to return to Paris, go straight to the convent and tell the prior that he positively preferred imprisonment to exile, and consented to be scourged, if necessary, twice a day, provided they would engage to furnish him daily with his meals, which he would even consent to reduce to five.

This idea, which furrowed the poor monk's brain for more than a whole quarter of an hour, was followed by another a little more practicable. This was to go straight to the Corne d'Abondance, ask for Chicot, even if he were still asleep, expose the deplorable situation in which he found himself after his bacchanal suggestions, to which he, Gorenflot, should have found the strength to resist, and obtain a small pension from that generous friend. This plan occupied Gorenflot for another quarter of an hour, because his was a judicious mind and the idea was not without some merit.

There was also another idea which was not wanting in audacity, and which consisted in re-entering through the Porte Saint-Germain or the Tour de Nesle, and clandestinely continuing his collections in Paris. He knew the good places, the fertile corners, the little streets where certain housewives, owners of delightful chickens, always had some fat capon to throw into his wallet. He saw, in the grateful mirror of his memory, a certain house, the inhabitants of which made preserves of all kinds every summer, with the principal object—at least, so was Brother Gorenflot pleased to imagine—of throwing into the monk's wallet, in exchange for his paternal benediction, either a quart of quince jelly, or a dozen candied nuts, or a box of dried apples, the mere odor of which sufficed to make a dead man thirsty. It must be confessed that Brother Gorenflot's thoughts were principally centred on the pleasures of the table and the delights of rest; sometimes he could not help thinking without a pang of the devil's two lawyers, who would appear against him on the judgment day, and who were called Laziness and Gluttony. But in the mean while, our worthy friend

was treading, not without remorse perhaps, but was nevertheless treading the primrose path which leads to the bottomless pit, where, like Scylla and Charybdis, the two mortal sins were forever howling.

Therefore, this last plan seemed pleasant to him ; this style of life seemed the one to which he appeared to be naturally destined ; but to accomplish this plan and lead this life, it was necessary to remain in Paris and run the risk of meeting the archers, the Swiss, or the ecclesiastical authorities, all of whom constituted a rather serious danger for a vagabond monk.

Then there was another drawback ; the treasurer of Sainte-Genevieve's Convent was too careful to leave Paris without a brother collector. Gorenflot was therefore in imminent danger of finding himself face to face with a colleague who would have over him the unquestionable advantage of being in the lawful exercise of his functions.

These ideas filled our worthy friend with terror, and we must admit that it was not without reason.

He had reached this point of his soliloquies and his apprehensions, when he saw, coming through the Porte Bordelle, a horseman, who soon shook the ground beneath his horse's hoofs. This man alighted near a house situated about a hundred feet from the spot where Gorenflot was seated. He knocked ; the door opened, and horse and rider disappeared into the house. Gorenflot observed this circumstance, because he had envied this man who had a horse and could therefore sell it.

But after an instant the horseman, whom Gorenflot recognized by his cloak,—the horseman, we say, left the house ; and as there was a clump of trees at a short distance, and a pile of stones before these trees, he went and stationed himself between the trees and this bastion of a new kind.

“ This is surely some ambush being prepared,” murmured Gorenflot. “ If I were on better terms with the archers, I would go and inform them ; or if I were braver, I would oppose it.”

At this moment the ambushed man, whose eyes only

eft the city gate to inspect the vicinity with a certain uneasiness, perceived, in one of those rapid glances, which he threw to the right or to the left, Gorenflot, still seated and still holding his chin in his hand. This sight annoyed him, and he pretended to be walking around with no purpose.

"That walk," said Gorenflot, "that appearance, seems familiar ; but no, it is impossible."

At this moment the unknown man, whose back was turned to Gorenflot, suddenly sank down as if the muscles of his legs had given way beneath him. He had just heard the sound of horses' hoofs coming from the city.

In fact, three men, two of whom seemed to be lackeys, three good mules, and three portmanteaux, came slowly from Paris through the Porte Bordelle. So soon as he perceived them, the man near the stones made himself even smaller, if that were possible, and crawling, rather than walking, reached the group of trees ; then choosing the largest one, he hid behind it in the position of the hunter lying in wait.

The cavalcade rode on without seeing, or rather without noticing him ; whereas, on the contrary, the man devoured it with his eyes.

"It is I who have prevented the crime from being committed," said Gorenflot, to himself, "and my presence on the road at this precise moment is one of those manifestations of the Divine will such as would be needed to provide me with a breakfast."

The cavalcade having ridden by, the man re-entered the house.

"Good !" said Gorenflot, "either I am much mistaken, or this circumstance will procure for me the much desired boon. Man who watches hates spies. Here is a secret in my possession, and were it worth only six farthings,—well ! I shall put a price on it."

Without delay Gorenflot wended his way towards the house ; but as he approached, he remembered the horseman's martial bearing, the long sword that hung at his

side, and the terrible look in his eye as he watched the passing of the men ; then he said to himself,—

“ I believe I was positively mistaken, and that such a man will not allow himself to be intimidated.”

At the door, Gorenflot was quite convinced, and he no longer scratched his nose, but his ear. All at once his face lighted up.

“ An idea ! ” he said.

The awakening of an idea in the monk’s sleepy brain was such a progress that he himself was surprised ; but even in those days there was a saying that Necessity is mother to Invention.

“ An idea ! ” he repeated,—“ and a rather ingenious idea. I shall say to him : ‘ Monsieur, every man has his plans, his desires, his hopes. I shall pray for your plans ; give me something.’ If his plans are evil ones, of which I have no doubt, he will have a double need of prayers, and will give me some alms for that purpose, and I shall put the case before the first learned priest I may meet. I shall ascertain whether we must pray for plans which we do not know, but which we suspect, to be bad. I shall do whatever the priest will tell me ; consequently he will be responsible, not I. And if I meet no priest—Well ! if I meet no priest, as there is some doubt, I shall abstain. In the mean time, I shall have breakfasted with the alms of the man with the evil intentions.”

In consequence of this determination, Gorenflot placed himself along the wall and waited. Five minutes later the door opened and the horse and rider reappeared, the one carrying the other. Gorenflot approached.

“ Monsieur,” said he, “ if five *Paters* and five *Aves* for the success of your plans would be agreeable to you—”

The man turned his head towards the monk.

“ Gorenflot ! ” cried he.

“ Monsieur Chicot ! ” said the monk, in amazement.

“ Where in the devil are you going ? ” asked Chicot.

“ I do not know ; and you ? ”

“ It is different with me,—I know,” said Chicot. “ I am going straight before me.”

"Very far?"

"Until I stop. But you, my friend, since you cannot tell me how you come to be here, I suspect one thing."

"What is it?"

"That you were spying on me."

"Good heavens! I spying on you! May the Lord preserve me! I saw you,—that is all."

"Saw what?"

"Saw you watching the passage of the mules."

"You are crazy."

"Nevertheless, your eyes seemed very attentive from behind those stones."

"Listen, Gorenflot, I wish to build a house outside of the walls; these stones are mine, and I was making sure that they are of good quality."

"Ah, that is different," said the monk, who did not believe a word of what Chicot was telling him; "I was mistaken."

"But you, yourself, what are you doing outside the walls of Paris?"

"Alas! Monsieur Chicot, I am exiled," replied Gorenflot, with a deep sigh.

"What?" asked Chicot.

"Exiled, I tell you."

And Gorenflot, draping himself in his gown, straightened up and threw back his head with that imperative look of the man to whom some great misfortune gives the right to demand his fellow creatures' pity.

"My brethren reject me from their fold," he continued. I am excommunicated, anathematized."

"Pshaw! and why so?"

"Listen, Monsieur Chicot," said the monk, laying his hand on his heart; "you may believe me if you will, but upon my word I don't know."

"Is it not because you may have been drinking your ill last night?"

"What a horrible joke! You know perfectly well what I did last night."

" Yes," replied Chicot, " from eight o'clock until ten but not from ten until three."

" How from ten until three ? "

" No doubt you went out at ten o'clock."

" I ? " said Gorenflot, looking at the Gascon with eyes dilated by surprise.

" Yes ; and I asked you where you were going."

" Where I was going,—you asked me that ? "

" Yes."

" And what did I answer ? "

" You said you were going to make a speech."

" There is truth in all this," said Gorenflot very much shaken.

" *Parbleu !* it is so true that you recited to me a part of your speech ; it was very long."

" It was in three parts ; that is the division recommended by Aristotle."

" There were even some terrible things against King Henri III. in your discourse."

" Bah ! " said Gorenflot.

" So terrible that I should not be surprised if you were pursued as the instigator of the troubles."

" Monsieur Chicot, you open my eyes. Did I seem very much awake when I spoke to you ? "

" I must say, my friend, that you had a strange look ; your eyes particularly were quite fixed. You seemed to be awake and yet to be talking in your sleep."

" However," said Gorenflot, " I am sure of having waked up this morning at the Corne d'Abondance, even though the devil himself should swear to the contrary."

" Well, what is there surprising in that ? "

" How ! what is there surprising since you say that I left the Corne d'Abondance at ten o'clock ? "

" Yes, but you returned at three o'clock in the morning, and to prove it, I shall even say that you left the door open, and that I was very cold."

" So was I," said Gorenflot ; " I remember."

" You see ! " replied Chicot.

" If what you tell me be true—"

"How! if what I tell you be true? My friend, it is true. Ask Maître Bonhomet."

"Maître Bonhomet?"

"No doubt it was he who opened the door. I must even say that you were filled with pride when you returned, and I said to you, 'Fie! pride is not befitting a man, particularly when that man is a monk.'"

"And what was the cause of this pride?"

"The success of your speech, and the compliments you received from the Duc de Guise, the cardinal, and M. de Mayenne,—may God preserve him!" added the Gascon, raising his hat.

"Then all is made clear to me," said Gorenflot.

"That is lucky; you therefore acknowledge that you did go to this assembly. What the devil did you call it? Wait a second! The assembly of the Holy Union,—that is it."

Gorenflot dropped his head on his breast and uttered a groan.

"I am a somnambulist," he said. "I suspected it long ago."

"Somnambulist?" said Chicot. "What does that mean?"

"That means, Monsieur Chicot," said the monk, "that with me the mind overrules the matter to such a point that while the matter is asleep the mind watches, and then the mind commands the matter which, though asleep, is forced to obey."

"Eh, my friend," said Chicot, "this greatly resembles magic. If you are possessed, own up to it frankly; a man who walks in his sleep, who gesticulates in his sleep, who makes speeches in which he attacks the king, and always in his sleep,—*ventre de biche!* it is not natural. Away, Beelzebub! *Vade retro Satanás!*"

And Chicot made his horse move aside.

"So you abandon me too, Monsieur Chicot," said Gorenflot. "Tu quoque, Brute. Ah, I never would have believed that of you."

And the monk, in despair, tried to modulate a sob.

Chicot took pity on this immense despair, which appeared only the more terrible for being concentrated.

“ Come,” said he, “ what did you tell me ? ”

“ When ? ”

“ Just now.”

“ Alas ! I don’t know. I am ready to go mad ; my head is full, and my stomach empty. Put me on the track, Monsieur Chicot.”

“ You spoke of travelling.”

“ That is true ; I told you that the reverend prior had invited me to travel.”

“ In what direction ? ”

“ In the direction that would please me.”

“ And where are you going ? ”

“ I don’t know.” Gorenflot raised his two arms to heaven. “ May God have mercy on me ! ” said he.

“ Monsieur Chicot, lend me two francs, to help me on my journey.”

“ I shall do better than that,” said Chicot.

“ Ah, let us see. What will you do ? ”

“ I too said that I was travelling.”

“ True, you did say so.”

“ Well, I shall take you with me.”

Gorenflot looked suspiciously at the Gascon, as if he did not dare believe in such a favor.

“ But on condition that you will be very good, and I shall allow you to be very impious. Do you accept my proposition ? ”

“ Do I accept it ? ” said the monk,—“ do I accept it ? But have we any money to travel ? ”

“ Here,” said Chicot, producing a purse, the graceful rotundity of which was very significant.

Gorenflot gave one joyful bound.

“ How much ? ” he asked.

“ One hundred and fifty pistoles.”

“ And where are we going ? ”

“ You shall see.”

“ When shall we breakfast ? ”

“ At once.”

" But what shall I ride ? " asked Gorenflot, with uneasiness.

" Not my horse, *corbœuf* ! You would kill it."

" Well," said Gorenflot, disappointed, " what shall I do ? "

" Nothing is more simple. You are fat like Silenus, and a drunkard like him. To make the likeness even more perfect, I shall buy you an ass."

" You are my king, Monsieur Chicot ; you are my sun— Take a strong ass— You are my God. Now, where shall we breakfast ? "

" Here, *morbleu* !—right here. Look above that door, and read if you know how."

They had in fact reached a sort of inn. Gorenflot followed the direction indicated by Chicot's finger and read.—

" Ham, eggs, eels, *pâtés*, and white wine for sale here."

It would be difficult to describe the change in Gorenflot's face at that sight. His countenance beamed, his eyes sparkled, his mouth spread from ear to ear, showing a double row of white and hungry teeth. Finally, he raised his two arms to heaven, and swaying his body to and fro, with a sort of rythmical motion, he sang the following song for which joy was his only excuse :—

" Quand l'ânon est délâché,
Quand le vin est débouché,
L'un redresse son oreille,
L'un sort de la bouteille.
Mais rien n'est si éventé
Que le moine en pleine treille.
Mais rien n'est si débâté
Que le moine en liberté."

" Very good," said Chicot ; " and to lose no time, my dear brother, sit down and eat while I go in search of an ass."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

HOW GORENFLOT TRAVELED ON AN ASS NAMED PANURGE,
AND DURING HIS JOURNEY LEARNED A GREAT MANY
THINGS OF WHICH HE WAS IGNORANT.

WHAT made Chicot so indifferent to his own stomach, for which he usually had as much condescension as any monk, was the fact that before leaving the hostelry of the Corne d'Abondance, he had copiously breakfasted. Great passions are said to nourish ; and Chicot at that moment had a great passion.

He therefore settled Gorenflot before one of the tables of the little house, where he was served with ham, eggs, and wine, which he caused to disappear with his usual celerity and capacity.

In the mean time, Chicot had gone out in quest of the ass ; he found the peaceful donkey which was the object of Gorenflot's desires, standing between an ox and a horse in the stable of some peasants, at Sceaux. He was four years old, of a brownish color, and supported a rather plump body on four legs as slender as pipe-stems. At that time, such a donkey was worth twenty crowns. Chicot gave twenty-two, and was blessed for his generosity.

When he returned with his conquest, and conducted it into the room where Gorenflot was dining, the latter, who had just absorbed half of an eel *pâté* and emptied his third bottle, delighted at the sight of his steed, and besides being moved to tenderness by the fumes of the wine, threw his two arms around the donkey's neck ; and having embraced it on either jaw, introduced between his teeth a long crust of bread, which made it bray with delight.

“ Oh, oh,” said Gorenflot, “ the animal has a fine voice, and we shall sometimes sing together. Thank you, friend Chicot, thank you.”

The monk immediately called his donkey by the name

f Panurge. Chicot glanced at the table and saw that without any tyranny he could ask his companion to leave his dinner. He therefore said, in that voice which Gorenflot never could resist,—

“ Come, come, my friend, let us start. We shall lunch at Melun.”

Chicot’s tone was so imperative, and yet in the midst of his stern command there was such an alluring promise, that instead of offering any resistance, Gorenflot repeated:

“ At Melun ! at Melun ! ” and without hesitating, he made use of a chair to clamber on to the ass, whose back was covered with a simple leather cushion from which hung two strips which were used as stirrups. The monk slipped his sandals into the two strips, took the halter in his right hand, put his left on his hip, and rode out of the inn as majestic as the god to which Chicot had likened him, with great justice.

As to Chicot, he vaulted into the saddle with the skill of a consummate rider, and the two horsemen set out immediately for Melun at a gentle trot.

They rode four leagues, then halted for a short while. The monk took advantage of the bright sunshine to lie on the grass and sleep. Chicot calculated his distance, and saw that to go one hundred and twenty leagues at ten leagues a day, it would take twelve days.

Panurge was idly browsing at a tuft of thistles. Ten leagues was all that could be expected of the combined strength of a monk and a donkey. Chicot shook his head.

“ That is not possible,” he murmured, looking at the monk sleeping on the roadside as comfortably as on a feather-bed, “ that is not possible ; to follow me, Gorenflot must travel at least fifteen leagues a day.”

As we see, the monk was now subject to nightmares. Chicot pushed his elbow to wake him up, and when he was awake, communicated his observation. Gorenflot opened his eyes.

“ Are we at Melun ? ” asked he. “ I am hungry.”

“ No, my friend,” said Chicot, “ not yet ; and this is

why I am waking you up. It is urgent that we should reach there. We are going too slowly, *ventre de biche*. we are going too slowly."

" Ah, does it make you angry to go slowly, dear Monsieur Chicot. The path of life leads upward, since it leads to heaven, and it is very fatiguing to ascend. Besides, why should we hurry ? The longer we take to make the journey, the longer we shall be together. Am I not travelling for the propagation of the faith and for your good pleasure ? Well, the more slowly we go, the better the faith will be propagated ; the more slowly we go, the better we shall amuse ourselves. For instance my advice would be to spend a few days at Melun. I am told one can eat there excellent eel *pâtés*, and I should like to make a careful comparison between the eel *pâtés* of Melun and those of other countries. What do you say to that, Monsieur Chicot ? "

" I say," replied the Gascon, " that my advice, on the contrary, is to go as quickly as possible, not lunching at Melun and only supping at Montereau, to regain the lost time."

Gorenflot looked at his travelling companion with the air of a man who does not understand.

" Come, start quickly," said Chicot.

The monk, who was lying stretched out with his hands clasped under his head, merely sat up and uttered a groan.

" After all," said Chicot, " if you wish to remain behind and travel at your own leisure, you are at liberty to do so."

" Not at all," said Gorenflot, frightened at the prospect of this isolation from which he had just escaped as it were by miracle,—" not at all ; I follow you, Monsieur Chicot. I love you too much to leave you."

" Then in the saddle, friend,—in the saddle ! "

Gorenflot led his ass to a wall and succeeded in settling himself on its back. This time, however, he was not straddling, but seated sideways, after the fashion of women. He pretended it was more convenient to talk ;

the fact is, that the monk had foreseen an increase of speed, so he had provided himself with two points to which he could hold on,—the mane and the tail. Chicot started at a brisk trot ; the donkey came behind, braying.

The first moments seemed terrible to Gorenflot ; fortunately, the portion on which he rested had such a broad surface that it was less difficult for him than for another to maintain his centre of gravity.

From time to time Chicot would rise in his stirrups, explore the road, and not seeing what he was seeking outlined against the horizon, double his speed.

Gorenflot allowed these first signs of investigation and of impatience to pass by without inquiring into the cause, preoccupied as he was in retaining his seat ; but when he had gradually accustomed himself to the pace, and when he observed that Chicot still continued this queer mode of acting,—

“ Well,” said he, “ what are you looking at, dear Monsieur Chicot ? ”

“ Nothing,” replied the latter ; “ I am looking to see where we are going.”

“ But we are going to Melun, it seems to me ; you said so yourself. You had even added—”

“ We make no speed ! we make no speed ! ” said Chicot, spurring his horse.

“ What ! we make no speed ? ” said the monk ; “ but we are always trotting.”

“ Gallop ! gallop ! ” said the Gascon, whose horse took that gait.

Panurge, carried away by example, also started at a gallop, but his ill-disguised rage boded his rider no good. Gorenflot’s suffocations increased.

“ Say, tell me, Monsieur Chicot,” he cried as soon as he could speak, “ you call this a pleasure trip ? But I am not having any pleasure.”

“ Forward ! forward ! ” replied Chicot.

“ But the road is steep.”

“ Good horsemen always gallop up hill.”

“ Yes, but I do not pretend to be a good horseman.”

" Then stay behind."

" Not at all, *ventrebleu !*" cried Gorenflot ; " not for the world ! "

" Well, then, as I told you, forward, forward ! "

Chicot made his horse go even more rapidly.

" Panurge is panting !" cried Gorenflot. " Panurge is stopping ! "

" Then good-by, friend," said Chicot.

For one instant Gorenflot had an idea of replying in the same manner, but he remembered that this horse which he cursed from the bottom of his heart, and who carried this whimsical man, also carried the purse which was in this man's pocket. He therefore resigned himself, and beating the sides of the furious donkey with his sandals, forced him to resume his gallop.

" I shall kill my poor Panurge !" lamentably cried the monk, making a decisive appeal to Chicot's interest as he seemed to have no influence on his sensibility. " I shall kill him, surely ! "

" Well, kill him, then ; kill him !" replied the Gascon who, in spite of this observation to which Gorenflot attached so much importance, in no way slackened his speed ; " kill him ! We shall buy a mule."

As if he had understood these threatening words, the donkey left the middle of the road and flew into a little hard side path where Gorenflot would not have ever dared to walk.

" Help ! help !" cried the monk. " I shall roll into the river."

" There is no danger," said Chicot ; " if you fall into the river, I guarantee you will float alone."

" Oh," murmured Gorenflot, " I shall die, surely. And to think that all this happens to me because I am a somnambulist !" And the monk raised his eyes to heaven with a look that meant, " Lord ! Lord ! what crime have I committed that you should inflict such calamity upon me ? "

Chicot, having reached the top of the hill, stopped his horse by such a short and sudden movement that the

nimal, taken by surprise, reared backward until it nearly fell over.

Gorenflot, who was not so good a horseman as Chicot, and who besides, instead of a bridle had only a halter,— Gorenflot, we say, continued his way.

“ Stop, *corbœuf* ! stop,” cried Chicot.

But the donkey had accustomed himself to the idea of gallop, and the ideas of a donkey are always tenacious.

“ Stop ! ” cried Chicot, “ or upon my word as a gentleman I shall send you a bullet.”

“ What a devil of a man he is ! ” said Gorenflot to himself, “ and what animal can have bitten him ? ”

Then, as Chicot’s voice sounded more and more terrible, and the monk already imagined he heard the whistling of the bullet with which he was threatened, he executed a manœuvre for which his position offered him every facility. That was, to slip off his steed on to the ground.

“ There ! ” he said, bravely sitting down and clutching the donkey’s halter with both hands. Panurge dragged him a few steps, but finally stopped.

Then Gorenflot looked for Chicot, to read on the latter’s face those marks of satisfaction which would be the inevitable result of so cleverly executed a manœuvre. Chicot was concealed behind a rock, and continued from there his threatening signals.

This precaution made the monk understand that there was something in the air. He looked down the road and perceived, five hundred yards ahead of them, three men peacefully riding their mules. At the first glance he recognized the travellers who had left Paris that morning through the Porte Bordelle, and whom Chicot had so eagerly watched from behind a tree.

Chicot waited in the same position until the three travellers were out of sight ; then only did he rejoin his companion, who had remained in the same place where he had fallen, still holding Panurge’s halter in his hands.

“ Ah, ah,” said Gorenflot who was beginning to lose patience, “ will you explain to me, Monsieur Chicot, what we are doing ? Just now, you made me run at break-

neck speed, and now we must stop short where we are."

" My good friend," said Chicot, " I wished to know whether your donkey came of a good race, and if I had not been swindled in paying for it twenty-two crowns. Now that I have made the test, I am more than satisfied."

The monk, we may well understand, was not deceived by this answer, and he was preparing to make known the fact to his companion when his natural laziness got the better of him and whispered to him not to enter into any discussion. He therefore answered without even concealing his ill-humour.

" No matter, I am very tired and very hungry."

" Well, why not ? " replied Chicot, slapping his companion's shoulder. " I too am hungry, I too am tired and at the first inn we meet on our—"

" Well ? " asked Gorenflot who could hardly believe the promise contained in the Gascon's words.

" Well," said the latter, " we shall order a pork chop, one or two stewed chickens, and a pitcher of the best wine in the cellar."

" Truly ! " said Gorenflot. " Is it sure this time ? "

" I promise you."

" Well, then," said the monk, rising, " let us set out at once in quest of this famous hostelry. Come, Panurge, you shall have some bran."

The ass began to bray with pleasure. Chicot re-mounted his horse, and Gorenflot led his donkey by the halter.

The much desired inn was soon visible to the travellers it arose between Corbeil and Melun. But to Gorenflot's great surprise, while he was admiring its alluring appearance from afar, Chicot ordered him to resume his seat on the donkey, and turned to the left to pass behind the house. Besides, Gorenflot, whose intelligence was making rapid progress, understood at a single glance the reason for this change. The three mules of the travellers whose tracks Chicot was following, stood before the door.

" The events of our journey and the hours for our meal

will therefore depend on the whims of these accursed ravellers," thought Gorenflot. " That is sad."

And he breathed a deep sigh.

Panurge, who also perceived that they were leaving the straight line which every one, and even a donkey, knows to be the shortest one, stopped suddenly and stiffened himself on his four legs as if he had made up his mind to take root at the very spot where he found himself.

" Look ! " said Gorenflot in a doleful tone, " even my monkey will no longer advance."

" Ah, he will not advance," said Chicot ; " wait a minute."

He approached a hedge of cornel-trees and cut a switch five feet long, as large round as the thumb, strong and at the same time flexible.

Panurge was not one of those stupid quadrupeds that do not notice what takes place around them and that duly foresee events when these events fall upon their backs. He had followed Chicot's actions, for whom he was no doubt beginning to feel the consideration which the jester deserved ; and so soon as he guessed his intentions, he loosened his legs and set off again at a rapid pace.

" He is off, he is off ! " cried the monk to Chicot.

" Never mind," replied the latter ; " for one who travels with a monk and an ass a switch is never useless."

And the Gascon continued to trim his

CHAPTER XXIX.

HOW BROTHER GORENFLOT EXCHANGED HIS ASS FOR A MULE, AND HIS MULE FOR A HORSE.

HOWEVER, Gorenflot's tribulations were coming to an end, for that day at least ; after having made the circuit, they stopped at the rival inn, three quarters of a league further. Chicot took a room which overlooked the highway, and ordered the supper, which was served there ; but it was

easy to see that food was but a secondary consideration with him. He ate carelessly, but looked out and listened attentively. This preoccupation lasted until ten o'clock ; however, as at that hour he heard nothing, he raised the siege, and ordered that his horse and the monk's ass, strengthened by a double ration of oats and bran, should be ready to start at daybreak.

At this order, Gorenflot, who had seemed asleep for the past hour, and who was only in that delightfully drowsy condition following a hearty meal accompanied by generous draughts of good wine, breathed a sigh.

"At daybreak ?" he said.

"Eh, *ventre de biche !*" replied Chicot, "you must be accustomed to rise at that hour."

"Why so ?" asked Gorenflot.

"And morning prayers ?"

"I had a dispensation from the prior," replied the monk.

Chicot shrugged his shoulders, and the word "idlers" with an s, which indicates plurality, expired on his lips.

"Yes, idlers," said Gorenflot ; "yes, idlers ; and why not ?"

"Man is born to work," sententiously replied the Gascon.

"And the monk to rest," replied the friar ; "the monk is the exception to man."

And satisfied with this argument, with which Chicot himself had seemed impressed, Gorenflot left the room with great dignity, and went to his bed, which Chicot (no doubt through fear of some imprudence) had had prepared in his own room.

In fact, the next day at dawn if Brother Gorenflot instead of continuing to sleep, had been awake, he would have seen Chicot rise, approach the window, and place himself in observation behind the curtain.

Chicot, though hidden from view, stepped quickly back ; and if Gorenflot had not slept so soundly, he would have heard the mules' hoofs ringing on the pavement below.

The Gascon immediately went to Gorenflot, whom he hooked by the arm until the latter opened his eyes.

"Shall I never have a moment's peace?" murmured the monk, who had just slept ten hours on a stretch.

"Wake up, wake up," said Chicot; "dress yourself, and let us depart."

"But the breakfast," said the monk.

"It is on the road to Montereau."

"What is that?—Montereau," asked the monk, who was very ignorant in all matters relating to geography.

"Montereau," said the Gascon, "is the city where we breakfast; is that sufficient for you?"

"Yes," laconically replied Gorenflot.

"Well, then, my friend," said the jester, "I am going alone to pay for our lodging, and that of our animals; in five minutes, if you are not ready, I shall start without you."

A monk's toilet is not a long one; however, Gorenflot took six minutes. Therefore, when he reached the door, he saw that Chicot, punctual as a clock, had started ahead.

The monk mounted Panurge who, excited by the double ration of hay and oats that Chicot had just given him, started at a gallop of his own accord, and soon caught up with the Gascon. The latter was standing in his stirrups, and from his head to his feet, perfectly stiff. Gorenflot also stood up, and saw before him, outlined against the horizon, the three mules and three riders disappearing behind a hillock.

The monk heaved a sigh, and thought how sad it is to have a foreign influence ruling one's destiny.

This time, Chicot kept his word, and they breakfasted at Montereau.

This day greatly resembled the preceding one; the next one presented about the same series of events. We shall therefore pass rapidly over the details, and Gorenflot was gradually becoming used to this eventful life, when towards evening he observed Chicot's good spirits gradually leaving him. Since noon, he had not seen the shadow

of the three travellers he was following. He ate his supper in a bad humor and spent a bad night. Gorenflot ate and drank for two, and tried his best songs. Chicot remained impassible.

Day was hardly beginning to break, before he was up, shaking his companion ; the monk dressed himself, and they started at a trot, which soon changed into a frenzied gallop. But they ran in vain ; no mules were to be seen. At about noon, the horse and donkey were both exhausted.

Chicot went straight to a toll-house established on the bridge of Villeneuve-le-Roi for cloven-footed animals.

“ Have you seen three travellers ride by ? ” he asked. “ They were mounted on mules, and must have passed this morning.”

“ This morning ? ” replied the toll-keeper. “ No, but yesterday I did.”

“ Yesterday ? ”

“ Yes, yesterday, at seven o’clock.”

“ Did you notice them ? ”

“ As I notice all travellers.”

“ I ask if you remember the appearance of these men.”

“ There seemed to be a master and two lackeys.”

“ That is it,” said Chicot, giving a crown to the toll-keeper. Then, speaking to himself,—

“ Last night, at seven o’clock,—*ventre de biche* ! they have an advance of twelve hours. Come, courage ! ”

“ Listen, Monsieur Chicot,” said the monk. “ I have courage for myself, but I have no more for Panurge.”

In fact, the poor animal, who had been over-ridden for the past two days, was trembling on its four legs and communicated to Gorenflot the agitation of its poor body.

“ And your own horse,” continued Gorenflot,—“ see in what a condition it is.”

In fact, the noble animal was covered with foam, and a hot vapor came through his nostrils, while the blood seemed ready to rush from his eyes. Chicot rapidly examined the two beasts, and apparently shared his

ompanion's opinion. Gorenflot was beginning to breathe freely, when Chicot suddenly said,—

“ Now, good brother, we must make a great decision.”

“ But we have done nothing else for the past few days,” said Gorenflot, whose face fell before even hearing what the proposition was to be.

“ We must separate,” said Chicot, who always began by taking the bull by the horns, so to speak.

“ Pshaw ! ” said Gorenflot. “ Always the same joke. Separate ? Why so ? ”

“ You go too slowly, my friend.”

“ *Vertudieu !* ” said Gorenflot, “ but I am going like the wind ; we galloped this morning for five hours in succession.”

“ That is not yet enough.”

“ Then let us start ; the faster we go, the sooner we shall reach our destination,—because, I presume, we have some destination.”

“ My horse can no longer walk, and your ass refuses to carry you.”

“ Then what are we to do ? ”

“ We shall leave them here and pick them up on our way back.”

“ But we ? Do you intend to continue the way on foot ? ”

“ We shall ride mules.”

“ Where shall we find them ? ”

“ We shall buy them.”

“ Come,” said Gorenflot, with a sigh, “ another sacrifice.”

“ So ? ”

“ So let us have the mules.”

“ Bravo, my friend ! you are beginning to reform ; commend Bayard and Panurge to the innkeeper's care. I am going to attend to our purchases.”

Gorenflot conscientiously discharged the duty intrusted to him. During the four days of his intercourse with Panurge, he had appreciated, we shall not say his qualities, but his defects, and observed that the principal

ones, laziness and gluttony, were the ones to which he himself was most addicted. This observation had moved him, and Gorenflot parted from his ass with regret. But Gorenflot was not only greedy and lazy,—he was also selfish; and he was more willing to part from Panurge than to part from Chicot, who, as we have already observed, carried the money.

Chicot returned with two mules, on which they travelled twenty leagues that day. That evening he had the pleasure of beholding the three mules before the door of a blacksmith shop.

“ Ah ! ” said he, breathing for the first time.

“ Ah ! ” sighed the monk, in turn.

But Chicot’s practised eye recognized neither the harness of the mules nor the master nor his lackeys. The mules were reduced to their natural ornament,—that is to say, they were completely stripped. As to the master and the lackeys, they had disappeared. Moreover, a number of unknown men were gathered around these animals, and seemed to examine and appraise them. There was first, a horsedealer, then the blacksmith, with two Franciscan monks. They made the mules turn around, examined their teeth, their hoofs and their ears; in short, they were trying them.

A chill shot through Chicot’s whole body.

“ Go ahead,” he said to Gorenflot, “ approach the Franciscans, draw them aside, question them; from monk to monk, I hope you will have no secrets. Cleverly ascertain whose mules these are, the price for which they were sold, and, more particularly, what has become of their owners. Then come back and tell me.”

Gorenflot, who was uneasy at his friend’s uneasiness started off at a trot and returned a moment later.

“ Here is the story,” said he. “ Do you know where we are, to begin with ? ”

“ Eh, *morbleu !* we are on the road to Lyons. That is the only thing I did not care to know.”

“ Yes, but you wish to know what has become of the owners of these mules,—at least, so you told me.”

"Yes, speak on."

"The one who seems to be a gentleman—"

"Well?"

"The one who seems to be a gentleman has taken the road to Avignon,—a road that shortens the distance it seems, and which passes through Château-Chinon and Privas."

"Alone?"

"How alone?"

"I ask you if he has taken that road alone."

"With one lackey."

"And the other lackey?"

"The other lackey continued his way."

"Towards Lyons?"

"Towards Lyons."

"Capital! But why is the gentleman going to Avignon? thought he was going to Rome. But," continued Chicot, as if speaking to himself, "I am asking you things which you cannot know."

"Yes, I know them," replied Gorenflot. "Ah, you are surprised?"

"How do you know them?"

"Yes, he is going to Avignon because his Holiness, Pope Gregory XIII., has sent to Avignon a legate intrusted with full powers."

"Very good," said Chicot; "I understand. But the mules?"

"The mules were tired; they were sold to a horse-dealer, who wishes to sell them over to the Franciscans."

"How much?"

"Fifteen pistoles apiece."

"How did they continue their journey?"

"On horses that they bought."

"From whom?"

"From a captain of mercenaries who is here purchasing fresh horses."

"*Ventre de biche!*" cried Chicot, "you are a precious man, and it is only to-day that I have been able to appreciate you."

Gorenflot drew himself up with pride.

"Now," continued Chicot, "finish what you have so well begun."

"What must I do?"

Chicot alighted, and throwing the bridle to the monk

"Take the two mules and go and offer them to the Franciscans for twenty pistoles. They should give you the preference."

"They will," said Gorenflot, "or I shall denounce them to their superior."

"Bravo! my friend, you are learning."

"Ah, but how shall we continue our journey?" asked Gorenflot.

"On horseback, *morbleu!* on horseback."

"The devil!" said the monk, scratching his ear.

"Come, come," said Chicot, "a good horseman like you?"

"Well," said Gorenflot, "trust to luck. But where shall I find you?"

"On the city square. Wait for me there."

The monk advanced towards the Franciscans with a firm step, while Chicot took a side street that led to the square.

There, in the inn of the Coq-Hardi, he found the captain of the mercenaries, drinking a nice little wine of Auxerre, which the second-rate amateurs mistook for the best brands of Burgundy. He got from him new information which confirmed in every point that already obtained by Gorenflot. In one moment Chicot and the captain had struck a bargain for two horses which the latter immediately set down as dead, and which, thanks to this incident, he was able to sell for thirty-five pistoles. There only remained to settle the price for the saddles and bridles, when Chicot saw the monk appear through a side street carrying the two saddles on his head and the two bridles in his hand.

"Oh, oh, my friend, what is that?" he asked.

"Why, here are the saddles and bridles off our mules," replied Gorenflot.

"So you kept them?" said Chicot, with a broad smile.

"Yes," said the monk.

"And you sold the mules?"

"Ten pistoles apiece."

"And you have been paid?"

"Here is the money."

In Gorenfot's pocket was heard the jingling of coin.

"*Ventre de biche!*" cried Chicot, "you are a great man."

"That is what I am," said Gorenfot, with mild vanity.

"To work!" said Chicot.

"Ah, but I am thirsty," said the monk.

"Well, drink while I go to saddle our beasts, but not too much."

"One bottle?"

"Well, yes, one bottle."

Gorenfot drank two and came to return the money to Chicot. For one instant Chicot thought of giving the monk the twenty pistoles diminished by the price of the two bottles; but he reflected that on the day when Gorenfot would possess two crowns, he would cease to be his master. He therefore took the money without letting his companion perceive the little hesitation he had had, and vaulted into the saddle.

The monk did the same with the help of the captain, who was a God-fearing man, and who held his foot, in exchange for which service, so soon as he was perched on his horse, Gorenfot gave him his benediction.

"Very good," said Chicot, starting off at a gallop, "that fellow was well blessed."

Gorenfot, seeing his supper run before him, started off in pursuit. Besides, he was making progress in riding; instead of clutching the mane with one hand and the tail with the other as he used to do, he seized the pommel of the saddle with both hands, and with that single support galloped as fast as Chicot could wish.

He finally put forth even more activity than his patron, because every time that Chicot slackened his speed or

moderated his pace, the monk, who preferred galloping to trotting, continued his way, urging his horse onward.

Such noble efforts deserved their reward. The next evening, a little before reaching Chalons, Chicot spied Maître Nicolas David, still disguised as a lackey, and did not lose sight of him until they reached Lyons, whose gates they entered on the eighth day after their departure from Paris.

It was about the same time when, by an opposite road, Bussy, Saint-Luc, and his wife reached the Château de Méridor.

CHAPTER XXX.

HOW CHICOT AND HIS COMPANION SETTLED THEMSELVES
AT THE HOSTELRY OF THE GOLDEN SWAN, AND HOW
THEY WERE RECEIVED BY THE HOST.

MAÎTRE NICOLAS DAVID, still disguised as a lackey, rode on towards the Place des Terreaux, and chose the principal inn, which was that of the Golden Swan.

Chicot saw him enter, and stationed himself outside to ascertain whether he had found room and would not leave the house.

“ Have you any objections to the inn of the Golden Swan ? ” said the Gascon to his travelling companion.

“ Not the least,” replied the latter.

“ You will therefore enter there and engage a retired room. You will say that you expect your brother, and you will in fact wait for me on the door-step. I am going to walk about, and will only return at nightfall. At nightfall, I shall return, and find you at your post, and as you will have played sentinel, you will know the plan of the house, and conduct me to the room without exposing me to meet people I do not wish to see. Do you understand ? ”

“ Perfectly,” said Gorenflot.

“ Choose the room large, cheerful, easy of access, and

possible, next to that of the traveller who has just arrived ; try to get one that has windows on the street, so that I may see all who go in and out. Do not mention my name under any consideration, and promise the cook good fee."

Gorenflot acquitted himself marvellously well of his trust. After the room was chosen, the night came ; and after the night had come, he took Chicot by the hand and led him thither. The monk, who had the wiliness of the churchman, however limited his intelligence might be, made Chicot observe that their room, though situated on another landing, was adjoining to that of Nicolas Avid, and only separated from it by a partition of wood and plaster, through which a hole might be easily bored. Chicot listened to the monk with the greatest attention, and some one who could not have heard the orator and only seen the listener could have followed the words of the former on the latter's beaming face.

Then when the monk had finished,—

" All this deserves a reward," said Chicot ; " to-night you will have sherry for your supper, Gorenflot. Yes, you shall have some, *morbleu !* or I am not your friend."

" I do not know the intoxication of that wine," said Gorenflot ; " it must be agreeable."

" *Ventre de biche !*" replied Chicot, " you shall know it within two hours, I promise you."

Chicot sent for the host.

The readers will perhaps find that the narrator of this story takes them into a very great number of hostelries. To this he will reply that it is not his fault if his heroes, to serve the desires of their mistress, or to escape the king's anger, go some to the north, and the others to the south. Now, being placed between the period of antiquity where inns were unknown, thanks to the prevalent customs of hospitality, and modern life, where the inn is transformed into the *table d'hôte*, the reader must stop to force in the hostelries where the principal scenes of the book are being enacted. Besides, the caravansaries of our Western world presented themselves at that period

under a triple form, which was not without interest, and which has now lost much of its character ; this triple form was the inn, the hostelry, and the tavern. Observe, that we are not speaking here of those agreeable bathing houses which are without their equivalent to-day, and which, left by the Rome of the emperors to the Paris of our kings, borrowed from antiquity the agreeable multiplicity of its profane tolerances.

But under the reign of King Henri III., these establishments were still confined to the capital. The provinces only boasted of the hostelry, the inn, and the tavern.

We are now in a hostelry, and this was made clear by the host, who replied to Chicot, who had sent for him that he was engaged with a traveller who had arrived before, and that his new guest must have patience. Chicot guessed that this traveller was his lawyer.

“ What can they have to say to each other ? ” asked Chicot.

“ Do you think that the host and your man are in collusion ? ”

“ Well, you see, if that man with a sour face is our host—”

“ Himself,” said the monk.

“ And consents to talk with a man dressed as a lackey—”

“ Ah,” said Gorenflot, “ he has changed his clothes. He is now dressed all in black.”

“ All the more reason,” said Chicot. “ The host is no doubt in the intrigue.”

“ Shall I try to confess his wife ? ”

“ No,” said Chicot, “ it would suit me better if you would take a walk through the town.”

“ But the supper ? ” said Gorenflot.

“ I shall have it prepared in your absence. Here is a crown in the meanwhile.”

Gorenflot gratefully accepted.

More than once during the course of his journey the monk had indulged in those semi-nocturnal excursions which he adored, and which, thanks to his title of brother

surveyor, he could risk even in Paris, from time to time. But since he had left the convent, these excursions had become doubly dear to him. Gorenfot was now absorbing freedom through all his pores, and had already reached that point where he looked back on his convent as on a prison. He therefore went out with his robe tucked up on one side and his crown in his pocket. No sooner had he left the room than Chicot, without losing a moment, took a gimlet and began boring a hole on a level with his eye.

This opening, which was no larger than that of a tube, on account of the thickness of the planks, did not allow him to see distinctly into the different parts of the room, but by placing his ear close to this hole he could hear voices quite distinctly.

However, thanks to the position of the speaker in the room, chance enabled Chicot to obtain a good view of the host, who was conversing with Maître Nicolas David. As we have said, Chicot was forced to lose some words of the conversation, but from what he could hear, he understood that David was making a great boast of his fidelity towards the king, even mentioning a mission intrusted to him by M. de Morvilliers.

While he was speaking, the host listened no doubt with respect, but with a feeling of indifference, as he made no reply. Chicot even thought he observed, either in his looks or in the tone of his voice, a rather marked irony every time that David uttered the king's name.

"Eh, eh," said Chicot, "does our host happen to be a Leaguer? *Mordieu!* I shall soon find out;" and as nothing of great importance was being said in the next room, Chicot waited for the host to visit him in turn.

The door finally opened.

The host held his cap in his hand, but he had absolutely the same mocking smile that had struck Chicot as he saw him conversing with the lawyer.

"Sit down, my dear monsieur," said Chicot; "and before we make any definite arrangement, will you please listen to my story?"

The host did not seem favorably impressed by this beginning, and even made a sign with his head that he wished to remain standing.

"As you please, my dear monsieur," resumed Chicot.

The host made another sign, which seemed to mean that he had need of no one's permission to do as he pleased.

"You saw me this morning with a monk," continued Chicot.

"Yes, monsieur," said the host

"Hush! you must say nothing about it,—that monk is proscribed."

"What!" said the host. "Is he some Huguenot in disguise?"

Chicot took an air of offended dignity.

"Huguenot," he said with disgust, "who said Huguenot? Know that this monk is my relative, and that I have no Huguenot relatives. Come, my good man, you should blush to say such things."

"Ah, monsieur," replied the other, "such things have been seen."

"Never in my family, sir host. This monk is, on the contrary, the most relentless enemy of the Huguenots so much an enemy that he has fallen into disgrace with King Henri III., who protects them, as you know."

The host seemed to take a lively interest in Gorenfot's persecution.

"Silence!" he said, placing his finger on his lips.

"How, silence?" asked Chicot. "Do you happen to have any of the king's people here, perchance?"

"I fear it," said the host, shaking his head. "There next door, there is a traveller—"

"In that case," said Chicot, "my relative and I would escape at once; because, exiled, threatened—"

"And where would you go?"

"We have two or three addresses given to us by an innkeeper of our friends, Maître la Hurière."

"La Hurière! You know La Hurière?"

"Hush! you must not mention the fact, but we became acquainted on the night of Saint Bartholomew."

"Come," said the host, "I see that you and your relative are both holy men; I too know La Hurière. When I bought this hostelry, I was even tempted, out of friendship for him, to take the same sign,—*A la Belle Etoile*; but it was already known as the Golden Swan, and I feared the change might injure the trade. So, monsieur, you say that your relative—"

"Had the imprudence to preach against the Huguenots. His sermon was greeted with tremendous success. So much so that his Most Christian Majesty, made furious by his success which showed the true sentiments of the people, was seeking him to have him imprisoned."

"And then?" asked the host, in a tone of interest which could not be mistaken.

"Well, I carried him off."

"And you were right. Poor dear man!"

"M. de Guise had offered to protect him."

"What?—the great Henri de Guise? Henri the—"

"Henri the saint."

"Yes; as you said yourself, Henri the saint."

"But I feared civil war."

"Then," said the host, "if you are a friend of M. de Guise, you must know this," and he made with his hand a kind of mechanical sign by the aid of which the Leaguers recognized each other.

During that famous night that he had spent in the convent of Sainte-Genevieve, Chicot had noticed not only his sign, which had been made about twenty times before him, but also the one that replied to it.

"*Parbleu!*" said he, "and you know this?"

He made the other sign in turn.

"Now," said the innkeeper, in the most friendly manner, "you are here at home, my house is yours. Look upon me as a brother; I look upon you as a friend; and if you have no money—"

Chicot replied by drawing out a purse which, though lightened of some of its contents, still presented a rather respectable corpulence.

The sight of a well-filled purse is always a pleasant one,

even to the generous man who offers you money and thus learns that you are in need of none. He has the merit of the offer without any necessity to carry it into execution.

"Good!" said the host.

"To further set you at rest," added Chicot, "I shall tell you that we are travelling for the propagation of the faith, and that our journey is paid by the treasurer of the Holy Union. Point out to us an inn where we shall have nothing to fear."

"*Morbleu!*" said the host, "nowhere will you be in greater safety than you are here."

"But you were speaking just now of a man in the next room."

"Yes, but let him behave himself, because at the first bit of spying I catch him doing, he shall go, on the word of a Bernouillet."

"Your name is Bernouillet?" asked Chicot.

"Yes, monsieur, and it is well-known among the faithful of the Provinces, though not perhaps of the capital; I can boast of that. Speak but one word, a single one, and I shall send him away."

"Why so?" said Chicot. "Leave him on the contrary. It is better to be near one's enemies,—to watch them."

"You are right," said Bernouillet, with admiration.

"But what makes you believe that this man is our enemy? I say *our* enemy," continued the Gascon with a tender smile, "because I see that we are brothers."

"Oh, yes, certainly," said the host, "I believe it because—"

"Because what?"

"He arrived here disguised as a lackey, then he put on a sort of lawyer's dress. Now, he is no more a lawyer than a lackey. Under a cloak thrown on a chair, I saw the end of a long sword; then he spoke of the king as no one speaks of him and finally confessed that he had a mission from M. de Morvilliers, who is, as you know, minister of Nebuchadnezzar."

"Of the Herod, as I call him."

" Of the Sardanapalus."

" Bravo ! "

" Ah ! I see that we understand each other," said the host.

" Pardieu ! " said Chicot, " I shall therefore remain."

" I should hope so."

" But not a word about my relative."

" Pardieu ! "

" Nor about me."

" For whom do you take me ? But hush, here is someone."

Gorenflot appeared on the threshold.

" Oh ! It is he, the worthy man," cried the host.

He went up to the monk and made the sign.

This sign filled Gorenflot with astonishment and fright.

" Answer, answer, brother," said Chicot, " our host knows all. He is a member."

" A member of what ? " asked Gorenflot.

" Of the Holy Union," said Bernouillet in a low voice.

" You see you can answer ; why don't you do it ? "

Gorenflot answered, and the innkeeper was filled with joy.

" But," said Gorenflot, who was anxious to change the conversation, " you had promised me sherry wine."

" Sherry, Malaga, all the wines of my cellar are at your service, brother."

The monk's eyes wandered from the host to Chicot, and from Chicot to heaven. He understood nothing of what was taking place, and it was evident that in his monastic humility he admitted that his happiness was far in excess of his deserts.

Gorenflot drank for three. On the first day it was with sherry, and on the second with Malaga, that he became intoxicated ; but in spite of their delights, the monk was forced to admit his preference for Burgundy, and returned to the Chambertin.

While Gorenflot was engaged in these comparisons, Chicot did not leave his room, and watched Maître Nicolas David from morning till night. The host, who

attributed Chicot's seclusion to his fear of the pretended royalist, played a thousand little tricks on the latter.

But they were of no avail,—at least, in appearance. Nicolas David had appointed to meet Pierre de Gondy in the hostelry of the Golden Swan, and would not leave his temporary dwelling for fear that MM. de Guise's messenger might not be able to find him, so that, in presence of the host, he seemed indifferent to all. It is true that when the door had closed behind Maître Bernouillet, Nicolas David gave Chicot the diverting spectacle of his solitary furies.

The very day after his arrival in the hostelry, having perceived his host's evil intentions towards him, the following words escaped him as he shook his fist after the innkeeper's vanishing figure,—

“ In five or six days you will pay for this, you rascal.”

Chicot knew enough ; he was sure that Nicolas David would not leave the inn until he had an answer from the legate. But at the approach of this sixth day, which was the seventh of his stay in the inn, Nicolas David, who had been told by the host, in spite of Chicot's entreaties that he must give up his room,—Nicolas David, we say became ill.

The host insisted on his going while he was still able to walk. The lawyer asked to remain until the next day, saying he would surely be better. The next day he grew worse. It was the host himself who came to announce this piece of news to his friend the Leaguer.

“ Well,” he said, rubbing his hands, “ our friend Herod is about to go to another world.”

“ Ah ! ” said Chicot, “ do you think he will die ? ”

“ It is an abominable fever, with attacks that make him bound out of bed. He has the appetite of a demon. he wanted to choke me and beats my servants. The doctors cannot understand it.”

Chicot reflected.

“ Have you seen him ? ” he asked.

“ Certainly, since I tell you he wanted to strangle me.”

“ How was he ? ”

" Pale, agitated, haggard, and shrieking like one possessed."

" What did he shriek ? "

" Save the king ! They wish to harm the king ! "

" The wretch ! "

" The rascal ! From time to time he says he expects a man from Avignon, and that he must see this man before he dies."

" Do you see that ? " said Chicot. " He speaks of Avignon."

" At every minute."

" *Ventre de biche !*" said Chicot, uttering his favorite oath.

" Tell me," said the host, " would it not be queer if he were to die here ? "

" Very queer," said Chicot ; " but I hope he will not die before the arrival of the man from Avignon."

" Why so ? The sooner he dies, the sooner we will be rid of him."

" Yes, but I do not carry hatred to the point of wishing him to lose both body and soul ; and since this man is coming from Avignon to confess him— "

" Eh ! That is some fancy of his fevered brain, some him of a diseased imagination, and he expects no one."

" Well, who knows ? " said Chicot.

" Ah, you are a good sort of a Christian," replied the host.

" Return good for evil, says the Divine law."

The host withdrew in admiration.

As to Gorenflot, who had remained entirely outside of these events, he was visibly growing fat. At the end of a week, the staircase that led to his room creaked beneath his weight, and began to squeeze him between the railing and the wall, so much so that Gorenflot announced to Chicot one night that the stairs had grown smaller. Moreover, neither David nor the League nor the deplorable condition of the Church were capable of moving him. His only care was to vary his meals and make the different

kinds of wine harmonize with the different dishes, while the host, each time that he saw him go in or out, repeated with amazement,—

“ And to think that this fat man is a torrent of eloquence.”

CHAPTER XXXI.

HOW THE MONK CONFESSED THE LAWYER, AND HOW THE LAWYER CONFESSED THE MONK.

FINALLY dawned the day which was to rid the innkeeper of his guest. Maître Bernouillet rushed into Chicot's room with such immoderate bursts of laughter that the latter had to wait some time before he could learn the cause of this merriment.

“ He is dying ! ” cried the charitable innkeeper ! “ he is expiring ! ”

“ And that makes you laugh ? ” asked Chicot.

“ I should think so ; the trick was a marvel.”

“ What trick ? ”

“ Now confess that you played it on him.”

“ I played a trick on the sick man ? ”

“ Yes ! ”

“ What is it ? What has happened to him ? ”

“ What has happened to him ? You know he was always calling for his man from Avignon.”

“ Well, has the man finally come ? ”

“ He is here.”

“ Have you seen him ? ”

“ Parbleu ! Do I not see every person who enters here ? ”

“ What is he like ? ”

“ The man from Avignon ? Small, slender, and rosy.”

“ That is it,” said Chicot, involuntarily.

“ There, you see it was you who sent him, since you recognize him.”

“ The messenger has arrived ! ” cried Chicot, risin-

nd twirling his moustache, “ *ventre de biche !* tell me all bout it, friend Bernouillet.”

“ Nothing is more simple, particularly as you played he trick. About an hour ago, while I was hanging up rabbit, a large horse and a little man stopped before the loor.

“ ‘ Is Maître Nicolas here ? ’ ” asked the little man. ‘ hat was the name given by that infamous royalist, you now.

“ ‘ Yes, monsieur,’ I replied.

“ ‘ Tell him that the person he expects from Avignon is here.’ ”

“ ‘ Willingly, monsieur, but I must inform you of one hing.’ ”

“ ‘ What is that ? ’ ”

“ ‘ That Maître Nicolas, as you call him, is dying.’ ”

“ ‘ All the more reason for you to carry the message without delay.’ ”

“ ‘ But you do not know that he is dying of a malignant ever.’ ”

“ ‘ Really ? ’ said the man. “ Then I could not ecommend too much speed.’ ”

“ ‘ What ! you persist ? ’ ”

“ ‘ I persist.’ ”

“ ‘ In spite of the danger ? ’ ”

“ ‘ In spite of everything ; I tell you I must see him.’ ” The little man was getting angry, and spoke in an imperative tone which admitted of no reply. I therefore conducted him to the dying man’s room.”

“ So he is now there ? ” asked Chicot, extending his hand in the direction of that room.

“ Yes, is it not funny ? ”

“ Extremely funny,” said Chicot.

“ What a pity we cannot hear.”

“ Yes, a great pity.”

“ The scene must be comical.”

“ To the highest degree ; but who prevents you from going in ? ”

“ He asked me out.”

“ Under what pretext ? ”

“ Under pretext that he was about to confess.”

“ Who prevents you from listening at the door ? ”

“ Eh, you are right,” said the host, rushing from the room.

Chicot now ran to his peep-hole. Pierre de Gondy was seated at the sick man’s bedside, but both spoke in such low tones that Chicot was unable to hear a word of their conversation. Even had he been able to hear, this conversation, which was drawing to a close, would not have told him much. Five minutes later, M. de Gondy rose, took leave of the dying man, and went out. Chicot ran to the window.

A mounted lackey held the bridle of the large horse mentioned by the host. A moment later, MM. de Guise’s ambassador appeared, got into the saddle, and rode off in the direction of the road to Paris.

“ *Mordieu !* ” said Chicot, “ provided he is not carrying off the genealogy ; at all events, I can always join him, even should I kill ten horses to do so. But no lawyers are sly foxes, particularly this one, and I suspect— I should like to know,” continued Chicot impatiently stamping his foot, and evidently connecting this idea with some other,—“ I should like to know the whereabouts of that rascal Gorenfot.”

The host returned at this moment.

“ Well ? ” asked Chicot.

“ He is gone,” said the host.

“ The confessor ? ”

“ Who is no more a confessor than I.”

“ And the patient ? ”

“ He fainted after the interview.”

“ Are you sure he is still in his room ? ”

“ *Parbleu !* he shall probably leave it only for his grave.”

“ Very well. Go and send me my brother so soon as he arrive.”

“ Even if he be intoxicated ? ”

“ No matter what his condition may be.”

" It is then urgent ? "

" It is for the good of the cause."

Bernouillet hastily went out. He was full of zeal. It was now Chicot's turn to have fever ; he did not now whether he ought to run after Gondy, or penetrate into David's room. If the lawyer were really as ill as the innkeeper pretended, he had probably intrusted the dispatches to M. de Gondy. Chicot paced the floor like a madman, striking his forehead, and trying to find an idea amid the seething mass of his brain.

Nothing more could be heard in the next room. Chicot could only perceive one corner of the bed, hidden by the curtains.

A voice suddenly sounded on the stairs. Chicot started ; it was the monk's. Gorenfot, pushed upstairs by the host, who was vainly endeavoring to make him usher, was slowly approaching and singing in a maudlin voice,—

" Le vin
Et le chagrin
Se battent dans ma tête ;
Ils y font un tel train
Que c'est un tempête.
Mais l'un est plus fort :
C'est le vin !
Si bien que le chagrin
En sort
Grand train."

Chicot ran to the door.

" Silence, drunkard ! " he cried.

" Am I a drunkard because I have been drinking ? " said Gorenfot.

" Now, come here. You understand, Bernouillet ? "

" Yes," replied the innkeeper, making a sign of intelligence, and running down the stairs, four at a time.

" Come here, I tell you," continued Chicot, pulling the monk into the room, " and let us talk seriously, if you can."

" *Parbleu !*" said Gorenfot. " You must be jesting. I am as serious as an ass that drinks."

"Or who has drunk," said Chicot, shrugging his shoulders. He then conducted Gorenflot to a seat, on which the latter let himself drop with a sigh of relief. The Gascon closed the door, and returned to Gorenflot with such a serious face that the monk understood he must listen.

"Well, is there anything *more*?" he said, as if this word summed up all the persecutions that Chicot made him endure.

"Yes," rudely replied Chicot. "You do not think enough of the duties of your profession; you are wallowing in debauch, rotting in drunkenness, and during that time, religion is taking care of itself, *corbœuf*!"

Gorenflot looked at Chicot with open-eyed amazement.

"I?" said he.

"Yes, you. Look! you are disgusting to look at. Your dress is torn, you have fought on the way, your left eye is quite black."

"I?" repeated Gorenflot, more and more surprised at these reproaches to which Chicot had not accustomed him.

"No doubt you have mud above your knees, and what mud!—white mud, which proves that you have been drinking in the suburbs."

"That is really true," said Gorenflot.

"Wretch! a monk of Sainte-Genevieve! If you were even a Franciscan!"

"Chicot, my friend, am I so very guilty?" said Gorenflot, with emotion.

"You deserve that the fire of heaven should consume you to your very sandals. Take care; if this continues I shall abandon you!"

"Chicot, my friend," said the monk, "you would not do that."

"There are also archers in Lyons."

"Oh, spare me, dear protector!" stammered the monk, who began, not only to sob, but to bellow like a bull.

"Fie! the ugly brute," continued Chicot, "and what

noment do you choose to yield to such excesses ? The
ime when we have a dying neighbor."

" That is true," said Gorenflot, most contritely.

" Come, are you a Christian, yes or no ? "

" Am I a Christian ! " cried Gorenflot, rising. " Am
a Christian ! By the Pope, I am. I shall proclaim it on
saint Laurence's gridiron." And extending his arms, as
if about to swear, he began to sing in a voice that made
the window-panes rattle,—

" A Christian am I,
And that till I die."

" Enough ! " said Chicot, putting his hand over his
mouth. " If you are a Christian, do not let your brother
die without being shriven."

" That is just. Where is my brother, that I may shrive
him ? " asked Gorenflot. " But I must drink first ; I
am dying of thirst."

Chicot handed the monk a pitcher of water, which the
atter emptied almost entirely.

" Ah, my son," he said, as he replaced the pitcher upon
the table, " I am now beginning to see more clearly."

" That is lucky," said Chicot, who had made up his
mind to take advantage of the first lucid interval.

" Now, my tender friend," continued the monk,
whom must I confess ? "

" Our unfortunate neighbor, who is dying."

" Give him a pint of wine with honey," said Gorenflot.

" That may be good ; but he is in greater need of
spiritual than of temporal help. You must go to him."

" Do you think I am sufficiently prepared ? " timidly
asked the monk.

" You ! I have never seen you so full of unction as at
his moment. You will bring him back into the right
path if he has wandered from it ; you will send him
straight to paradise if he is seeking the road that leads
hither."

" I am going."

" Wait a second ; I must draw you a line of action."

“ Why so ? I know my trade, in the twenty years that I have been a monk.”

“ Yes ; but to-day you must not only follow your trade but my will.”

“ Your will ?”

“ Yes ; and if you do it properly I shall put a hundred crowns at the Corne d’Abondance for you, to eat or drink as you please.”

“ To eat *and* drink ; I prefer that.”

“ Well, you understand, a hundred crowns if you confess that worthy man.”

“ I shall confess him, or may the plague take me. How must I confess him ?”

“ Listen ; your gown gives you great authority ; you speak in the name of God and of the king. You must by your eloquence force that man to give you the papers which have just been brought to him from Avignon.”

“ Why must I make him give me those papers ?”

Chicot cast a pitying glance at the monk.

“ To get a hundred crowns, you double brute !” he said.

“ That is just,” said Gorenflot ; “ I am going.”

“ Wait ; he will tell you he has just confessed himself.”

“ Then, if he has confessed—”

“ You will reply that he lies ; that the man who has just left his room is not a confessor, but another intriguer like himself.”

“ But he will be angry.”

“ What does that matter, since he is dying ?”

“ Very true.”

“ Then you understand ; you will speak of God, you will speak of the devil, you will speak of whatever you like, but in some way or other you must manage to get those papers from Avignon.”

“ And if he should refuse ?”

“ You will refuse him absolution ; you will call him accursed ; you will excommunicate him.”

“ Or I shall take them by main force.”

"Yes, that would do. Now, tell me, are you sufficiently sobered to follow my instructions?"

"To the letter, you will see."

And Gorenflot, passing his hand over his wide face, seemed to efface all outward signs of intoxication; his eyes became calm, though a little careful attention might have shown them to be stupefied; the words he uttered were carefully enunciated; his gestures became sober, though still a little tremulous. He walked solemnly to the door.

"One moment," said Chicot; "when he will have given you the papers, hold them carefully in one hand, and knock on the wall with the other."

"And if he should refuse?"

"Knock too."

"Then in either case I must knock?"

"Yes."

"Very well."

Gorenflot left the room, while Chicot, a prey to indefinable emotion, placed his ear to the wall, so as to hear even the slightest noise. Ten minutes later, the creaking of the floor announced that Gorenflot had entered the room, and he soon saw him appear in the circle that lay within his range of vision.

The lawyer raised himself in bed and watched the strange apparition draw nearer.

"Well, how are you, brother?" said Gorenflot, stopping in the middle of the room, and throwing back his massive shoulders.

"What do you want, holy Father?" murmured the sick man, in a weak voice.

"My son, I am an unworthy priest. I heard you were in danger, and I came to speak of the salvation of your soul."

"Thank you," said the dying man, "but I think your trouble is useless; I am a little better."

Gorenflot shook his head.

"You think so," he said.

"I am sure of it."

“ It is a trick of Satan’s, who would like to see you die without confession.”

“ Satan would be very much caught,” said the sick man ; “ I confessed but a moment ago.”

“ To whom ? ”

“ To a worthy priest who came from Avignon.”

Gorenflot shook his head.

“ What ! is he not a priest ? ”

“ No.”

“ How do you know ? ”

“ I know him.”

“ The one who has just left here ? ”

“ Yes,” said Gorenflot, in such a tone of conviction that however difficult lawyers may be to upset, this one was shaken.

“ Now, as you are no better,” said Gorenflot, “ and as this man was not a priest, you must confess.”

“ I wish nothing better,” said the lawyer in a somewhat stronger voice ; “ but I wish to confess to whom I please.”

“ You have no time to send for any other, my son, and as I am here—”

“ What ! I shall not have time,” cried the sick man in a voice that grew stronger at every minute, “ when I tell you that I am better ; when I assure you that I am certain of recovery ? ”

Gorenflot shook his head for the third time.

“ And I,” he said, with the same imperturbable calmness, “ I assure you, my son, that I count on nothing good as far as you are concerned. You are condemned by the physicians, and also by Divine Providence. I know it is cruel to tell you this, but we all get there sooner or later. There is the scale of justice ; and besides, there is some consolation in dying in this world since we resurrect in the next. Pythagoras himself said it, my son, and he was only a pagan. Come, confess, my dear child.”

“ But I assure you, good Father, that I already feel stronger, and this is probably an effect of your holy presence.”

“ Error, my son, error,” insisted Gorenflot. “ At the

ast moment there is a vital recrudescence ; it is the dying lamp that flares up. "Come," continued the monk, sitting down near the bed, "tell me your intrigues, your plots, your machinations."

"My intrigues, my plots, my machinations ?" repeated Nicolas David, moving away from that singular monk whom he did not know and who seemed to know him so well.

"Yes," said Gorenflot quietly preparing to listen, and whirling his two thumbs above his clasped hands. "And when you will have told me all this, you will give me the papers, and God will perhaps permit me to give you absolution."

"What papers ?" cried the patient, in a voice as strong and ringing as if he had been in perfect health.

"The papers that this pretended priest has just brought you from Avignon."

"And who told you that this pretended priest had brought me any papers ?" asked the lawyer, thrusting one leg out of bed and speaking in such a sharp tone that Gorenflot was disturbed in the delightful feeling of drowsiness that began to invade him. Gorenflot thought the man had come to show vigor.

"The one who told me knew what he was saying," he replied. "Come, the papers, the papers, or no absolution."

"And what do I care about your absolution, youascal !" cried David, bounding out of bed and seizing Gorenflot's throat.

"Ah," cried the latter, "are you delirious ? Will you not confess ?"

The lawyer's thumb, skilfully and vigorously applied to the monk's throat, interrupted his phrase, which ended in a shrill sound very much resembling a hoarse rattle.

"I shall confess only you, monk of Beelzebub !" cried the lawyer ; "and as to delirium, you shall see if it will keep me from throttling you."

Brother Gorenflot was strong, but he was unfortunately at that stage of reaction where intoxication acts on the

nervous system and paralyses it. This usually happens just at the moment when, by a contrary reaction, the faculties begin to awaken. By summoning all his strength, he was only able to rise in his seat, clutch the lawyer's shirt in both hands and push him violently from him. It is only fair to say, however, that Brother Gorenfot, though greatly weakened, pushed David with such violence that he went rolling into the middle of the floor.

Nicolas picked himself up in a rage, and rushing to that long sword which Maître Bernouillet had noticed, and which was suspended to the wall, under his cloak, he drew it from the scabbard and pressed the point against the neck of the monk, who, exhausted by this supreme effort, had fallen back on his chair.

"It is your turn to confess," he hissed, "or you shall die."

Gorenfot, who was completely sobered by the disagreeable pressure of the cold steel on his neck, understood the gravity of the situation.

"Oh, oh," he said, "so you were not ill, and all this agony was but a pretence!"

"You forget that you are not to question but to answer," said David.

"Answer what?"

"My questions."

"Ask them."

"Who are you?"

"You see," said the monk.

"That is no answer," said the lawyer, burying the sword a little deeper.

"Ah, the devil! take care! If you kill me before I answer, you will know nothing at all."

"You are right: your name?"

"Brother Gorenfot."

"So you are a real monk?"

"A real monk? I should say so."

"Why are you in Lyons?"

"Because I am banished."

“ Who brought you to this inn ? ”

“ Chance.”

“ How long have you been here ? ”

“ Sixteen days.”

“ Why did you spy on me ? ”

“ I did not spy on you.”

“ How did you know I had received papers ? ”

“ Because I was told.”

“ Who told you ? ”

“ The one who sent me to you.”

“ Who sent you ? ”

“ This is what I cannot tell.”

“ And what you shall tell.”

“ Oh, now,” cried the monk, “ I shall call, I shall scream ! ”

“ And I shall kill.”

The monk gave a cry ; a drop of blood appeared at the point of the lawyer’s sword.

“ His name,” said the latter.

“ Oh, well I cannot help it ; I resisted as long as I could.”

“ Yes, go on, your honor is saved. The one who sent you to me—”

“ Is—”

Gorenflot still hesitated. He could not bring himself to betray friendship.

“ Go on,” said the lawyer, stamping his foot.

“ Well, so much the worse. It is Chicot.”

“ The king’s jester ? ”

“ Himself.”

“ And where is he ? ”

“ Here,” said a voice, and Chicot, pale and grave, appeared standing on the threshold, his naked sword in his hand.

CHAPTER XXXII.

HOW CHICOT, AFTER HAVING MADE A HOLE WITH A GIMLET,
MADE ANOTHER WITH HIS SWORD.

NICOLAS DAVID, on recognizing the man whom he knew to be his mortal enemy, could not repress a movement of terror. Gorenflot seized the opportunity to throw himself to one side, and thus interrupt the contract between his neck and the lawyer's sword.

"Come, tender friend!" he cried. "Help, help! To the rescue! I am being murdered."

"Ah, ah, dear Monsieur David," said Chicot, "so here you are!"

"Yes," stammered David, "here I am."

"Delighted to meet you," continued the Gascon. Then, turning to the monk, "My good Gorenflot," he said, "your presence as a monk was very necessary here just now when Monsieur was thought to be dying; but now that Monsieur is in perfect health he no longer needs a confessor; he will have a gentleman to deal with."

David tried to laugh scornfully.

"Yes, a gentleman," said Chicot, "who will show you that he is of good lineage. My dear Gorenflot," he continued, turning to the monk, "do me the favor to stand on the landing and prevent any one from disturbing me during the little conversation I wish to have with Monsieur."

Gorenflot was only too delighted to get away from Nicolas David. He passed by him, putting as much distance as possible between them, and, having reached the door, bounded out like a deer, feeling at least a hundred pounds lighter than when he entered. Chicot closed the door behind him and calmly drew the bolt.

David had first looked on at this scene with an amazement which resulted from the unexpectedness of the situation; but soon, trusting in his well-known skill with the sword, and in the fact that, after all, he was alon-

vith Chicot, he recovered, and when the Gascon turned round after having closed the door, he found him leaning against the foot of his bed, his sword in his hand, and a smile on his lips.

"Dress yourself, monsieur," said Chicot; "I shall give you both time and opportunity, as I wish to have no advantage over you. I know that you are a practised encer, and that you manage the sword as well as Leclerc n person; but I care nothing about that."

David began to laugh.

"The jest is a good one," he said.

"Yes," replied Chicot, "it seems so to me, at least, since I made it. You will find it much better later on, if you are a man of taste. Do you know what I have come to get in this room, Maître Nicolas?"

"The rest of the blows I owed you in M. de Mayenne's name, the day you so nimbly jumped through the window."

"No, monsieur; I know the number, and I shall return them to the one who had them given to me. What I have come to get is a certain genealogy which M. Pierre de Gondy took to Avignon without knowing what he carried, and, equally in ignorance, has just intrusted to you."

David turned pale.

"What genealogy?" he asked.

"That of MM. de Guise, who descend in a straight line from Charlemagne, as you know."

"Ah, ah," said David, "so you are a spy, monsieur! I thought you were only a buffoon."

"Dear Monsieur David, with your permission I shall be both,—a spy to have you hanged, and a buffoon to laugh at it!"

"To have me hanged?"

"High and short, monsieur. You do not expect to be beheaded, I hope; that is good for gentlemen."

"And how do you intend to bring that about?"

"Oh, very simply; I shall tell the truth, that is all. I must tell you, Monsieur David, that I was present last

month at a little council held in the chapel of Sainte-Genevieve by MM. de Guise and Madame de Montpensier."

" You ? "

" Yes. I was hidden in the confessional facing your own. It was very uncomfortable, was it not ? All the more so for me that I was obliged to wait until all was over before I could leave, and the whole affair was very long. I therefore had to listen to M. de Monsoreau, La Hurière, and another monk, whose name I have forgotten, but who seemed to me very eloquent. I know about M. d'Anjou's coronation, which was less amusing ; but in exchange, the little play was most funny. They acted the genealogy of MM. de Guise, revised and corrected by Maître Nicolas David. It was a very funny little piece which only lacked the approval of his Holiness the Pope."

" Ah, you know the genealogy ? " said David, hardly able to contain himself, and biting his lips with anger.

" Yes," said Chicot, " and I found it very ingenious particularly the part about the Salic law. Only it is a great misfortune to have so much wit. It brings one to the scaffold. Therefore, being filled with a tender interest for so clever a man, ' How,' said I to myself ' can I allow that good Monsieur David to be hanged,—so agreeable a fencing-master, so cunning a lawyer, one of my good friends ; and this when I cannot only save him from the gallows, but also make the fortune of this excellent friend, who was the first to give me the measure of my heart by taking the measure of my back ? No that cannot be.' Then having heard you speak of travelling, I undertook to travel with you, or rather behind you. You went out through the Porte Bordelle did you not ? I was watching you, and I am not astonished that you did not see me, I was so well hidden. From that moment I followed you,—losing you, finding you again, taking a great deal of trouble, I can assure you. We finally reached Lyons. I say *we*, because one hour after you had taken your room, I was settled in this same hotel, and in the room adjoining your own,—this

ne here,—with only a partition between us. You may well believe that I did not follow you all the way from Paris to Lyons to lose sight of you here. No, I made a little hole, thanks to which I had the advantage of examining you as much as I wished ; and I confess that gave myself that pleasure several times during the day. Finally, you became ill ; the host wanted to send you away, but you had appointed to meet M. de Gondy at the Golden Swan. You feared he would not be able to find you quickly enough if you went elsewhere. This was a use which only half deceived me. After all, you might have been really ill ; we are only mortal,—a fact of which I shall attempt to convince you later on. I sent a worthy monk, my friend and companion, to urge you to repentance ; but hardened sinner that you are, you tried to kill him, forgetting this maxim of the scripture, which says, ‘They that take the sword shall perish with the sword.’ Then, dear Monsieur David, I came, and I said to you, ‘Come, we are old acquaintances, old friends, let us settle the matter.’ Now that you know everything, will you settle with me ? ”

“ How so ? ”

“ Exactly as if you had been really ill. You would then have confessed to Gorenfot and given him the papers, would then have forgiven you, and would even have said a prayer for your soul. Well, I shall not be more exacting with the living than with the dead, and this is what I have to say : Monsieur David, you are an accomplished man. Fencing, horsemanship, chicanery, you possess every art, even that of putting fat purses into wide pockets. It would be a great pity for a man like you to disappear from the world where he is destined to make his fortune. Well, my dear Monsieur David, do not plot any more ; trust me, and break off with the Guises. Give me your papers, and I give you my word as a gentleman that I shall make your peace with the king.”

“ And if I do not give them to you ? ” asked Nicolas David.

"Ah, if you do not give them to me, that is another thing. I give my word as a gentleman that I will kill you. Do you still find this funny, dear Monsieur David ? "

"More and more," said the lawyer, playing with his sword.

"But if you give them to me," continued Chicot, "all will be forgotten. Perhaps you do not believe me, dear Monsieur David, because yours is a bad nature, and you imagine that my resentment has eaten into my heart as the rust eats the iron. No, I truly hate you ; but I hate M. de Mayenne even more. Give me the means to ruin him, and I shall save you. Then, shall I add a few words which you will not believe, you who love no one but yourself ? I love the king, foolish and corrupt as he is,—the king who gave me a refuge and a protection against your butcher Mayenne who, at the head of fifteen bandits, murders a single gentleman on the Place du Louvre. You know whom I mean. It was that poor Saint-Mégrin. Were you not one of the band ? No ? So much the better ; I thought so before, and now I am sure of it. Well, I want my poor King Henri to reign in peace, and that is impossible with the Mayennes and genealogies of Nicolas David. Give up this genealogy to me, and upon my honor as a gentleman, I shall keep your name secret and make your fortune."

During this long exposition of his ideas, which he had purposely made so long with that object, Chicot had intelligently observed Nicolas David. Not once did his eye quail, not a glimmer of feeling softened his contracted features.

"Come," said Chicot, "I see that all this has been wasted eloquence, and that you do not believe me. But I have a way to punish you for your ancient wrongs towards me and at the same time rid the earth of a man who no longer believes either in honesty or humanity. I shall have you hanged. Farewell, Monsieur David." He stepped backward towards the door without losing sight of the lawyer, who immediately bounded forward.

"And you think I shall let you go out ? " he cried.

'No, no, my fine spy ; no, no, Chicot, my friend. He who knows secrets like that of the genealogy must die ! He who threatens Nicolas David must die ! He who enters here as you entered must die."

"You put me perfectly at ease," said Chicot, with the same calmness. "I only hesitated because I am sure of killing you. Crillon, in fencing with me about two months ago, taught me a particular thrust,—only one, but it will suffice. Come, give me the papers," he added in a terrible voice, "or I shall kill you ; and let me tell you how : I shall pierce your throat, where you wished to bleed my friend Gorenflot."

Chicot had not finished these words before David rushed upon him with a savage laugh. The Gascon received him sword in hand. They were nearly matched in height, but Chicot's garments concealed his thinness, while nothing concealed the long, slender, flexible figure of the lawyer. He resembled a long serpent with his arm extending beyond his head, and his sword gleaming like a fiery tongue ; but as the jester had told him, he found a formidable opponent. Chicot, who fenced nearly every day with the king, had become one of the best swordsmen in the country. Nicolas David soon perceived this as he always found his adversary's sword, no matter how he attacked him. He took one step backward.

"Ah, ah, you are beginning to understand," said Chicot. "Once more, will you give me the papers ?"

David's sole reply was another attack, and a new combat ensued, longer and fiercer than the first, though Chicot merely parried, and did not strike a blow. This second struggle ended like the first, in a backward step by the lawyer.

"Ah, ah," said Chicot, "now is my turn," and he took a step forward. Nicolas David made a thrust to stop him ; Chicot parried, beat down his adversary's sword, and planted his own in the very spot he had indicated in advance, plunging it half way up to the hilt.

"That is the stroke," he said.

David did not answer ; he fell at Chicot's feet, losing a mouthful of blood. The Gascon took a step backward. Though mortally wounded, the serpent may yet rise up and bite. But David, by a natural movement, attempted to drag himself towards his bed, as if to defend his secret.

"Ah," said Chicot, "I thought you cunning, but you are a fool. I did not know where you had hidden your papers, but you have showed me," and while David was writhing in the convulsions of agony, Chicot ran to the bed, raised the mattress, and found a little roll of parchment, which the lawyer, ignorant of the catastrophe that threatened him, had not thought necessary to conceal with greater care. Just as he unrolled it to ascertain that it was really the paper he sought, David raised himself with rage, and falling back, breathed his last.

Chicot's eye flashed with joy and pride as he glanced over the parchment brought from Avignon by Pierre de Gondy. The Pope's legate, faithful to the policy followed by the sovereign pontiff since his accession to the throne, had written at the end,—

"Fiat ut voluit Deus : Deus jura hominum fecit."

"This is a pope, who is treating the Most Christian King very badly," said Chicot.

He carefully folded the parchment and placed it in the safest pocket of his doublet,—that is to say, the one next to his breast. Then he took the body of David, who had lost very little blood, the nature of the wound causing it to bleed internally, replaced it in the bed with the face turned to the wall, and opening the door, called Gorenflot. The monk entered.

"How pale you are," he said.

"Yes," said Chicot, "that poor fellow's last moments caused me some emotion."

"Then he is dead?"

"I have every reason to think so."

"He was so well a while ago!"

"Too well. He tried to eat things difficult to digest, and, like Anacreon, died of having swallowed the wrong way."

"Oh, oh," said Gorenflot, "the wretch tried to strangle me, a holy man, and it brought him bad luck."

"Forgive him, you are a Christian."

"I forgive him," said Gorenflot, "though he greatly frightened me."

"That is not all," said Chicot; "you must light tapers and mumble some prayers near his body."

"What for?" (This was Gorenflot's favorite phrase, if we remember right.)

"How, what for? Not to be taken and conducted to the city prisons as a murderer."

"I that man's murderer! Come now. It was he who wished to strangle me."

"*Mon Dieu!* yes; and as he was not able to succeed, rage set his blood in motion, and a blood-vessel must have burst. You see Gorenflot, that you are, after all, the cause of his death,—the innocent cause, it is true; but of what avail? Until your innocence is recognized, you might have a hard time of it."

"I think you are right, Monsieur Chicot," said the monk.

"All the more so, that in this good city of Lyons, the officials are a little hard to manage."

"Jesus!" murmured the monk.

"Do, then, as I tell you."

"What must I do?"

"Install yourself here and recite all the prayers you know and those you do not know, and at night-fall you will quietly leave the inn without undue haste. You know the blacksmith at the corner of the street?"

"Certainly; it was there I knocked my head last night," said Gorenflot, showing his black eye.

"A touching memory. Well, I shall see that you find your horse there; you will mount it without entering into explanations with any one; then, if you choose, you know the road to Paris. At Villeneuve-le-Roi you will sell your horse and take Panurge."

"Ah, that good Panurge. You are right, I shall be so happy to see him once more. But between now and

then," added the monk, in a pitiful tone, " how shall I live ? "

" When I give, I give," said Chicot, " and do not allow my friends to beg as they do at the Convent of Sainte-Genevieve. Here ! "

And Chicot drew from his pocket a handful of crowns, which he placed in the monk's broad hand.

" Generous man ! " said Gorenflot, moved to tears. " Let me remain with you at Lyons ; I like Lyons. It is the second capital of the kingdom ; and then the city is hospitable."

" But can you not understand, triple brute, that I am not staying here ; that I am going away so fast that I do not invite you to follow me ? "

" Your will be done, Monsieur Chicot," said Gorenflot, with resignation.

" Very good," said Chicot, " this is the way I like you."

He settled the monk near the bed, went down to the host, and taking him aside,—

" Maître Bernouillet," he said, " a great event has taken place in your house without your knowledge."

" What ? " asked the host, in a frightened manner.

" That hateful royalist, that deriding Catholic, that friend of the Huguenots—"

" Well ? "

" Well, he received this morning a messenger from Rome."

" I know that, since I was the one who told you."

" Well, our holy father the Pope, who has the right of temporal justice in this world, sent him directly to the conspirator ; only the conspirator did not, in all probability, know with what object."

" With what object did he send him ? "

" Go up to your guest's room, Maître Bernouillet, raise the bed-clothes, look around his neck, and you will see."

" Stop, you frighten me ! "

" I say no more. This act of justice was done in your

house. It is a great honor conferred upon you by the Pope."

Chicot then slipped ten crowns into the host's hand, and went to the stable to get the horses. During that time the innkeeper had run upstairs as light as a bird, and entered Maître Nicolas David's room. There he found Gorenflot praying. He then approached the bed and lifted the bed-clothes, according to the instructions he had received.

The wound was really there and still red, though the body was already cold.

" May all the enemies of our holy religion die thus ! " he said, with a knowing sign to Gorenflot.

" Amen ! " replied the monk.

These events took place about the same time that Bussy put Diane de Méridor in the arms of her father, who believed her dead.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

HOW THE DUC D'ANJOU LEARNED THAT DIANE WAS NOT DEAD.

DURING this time the last days of April had arrived. The great cathedral of Chartres was hung in white, and on the pillars wreaths of verdure replaced the still absent flowers.

The king, who had come barefooted from the gate of Chartres, was standing in the middle of the nave, looking from time to time to see if all his friends and courtiers were faithfully assembled. But some, made sore by the pavements of the streets, had resumed their shoes ; others, famished or tired out, were resting or eating in some wayside inn into which they had slipped by stealth, and only a small number had had the courage to stand on the damp stone floor of the church with their legs bare beneath their monks' robes.

The religious ceremony, the object of which was to give

an heir to the crown of France, was being accomplished. The two chemises of Notre-Dame, whose prolific virtues could not be doubted, considering the great number of miracles they had already performed, had been drawn from their golden reliquaries, and the people who had thronged to witness this ceremony bowed their heads beneath the fire of the rays that flashed from the tabernacle as the two tunics were drawn out.

At this moment, amid the general silence, Henri III. heard a strange sound,—a sound which resembled a smothered laugh,—and he turned round to look for Chicot, thinking that he alone would have the audacity to laugh at such a moment.

But it was not Chicot who had laughed at the sight of the two holy tunics. Chicot, alas! was absent; and this fact greatly saddened the king, who, as we remember, had lost sight of him on the road to Fontainebleau, and had heard nothing of him since then. It was a horseman whose foaming steed had just brought him to the church door, and who, with his mud-covered garments and boots, picked his way through the ranks of courtiers clad in monkish robes or sackcloth, and in either case bare-footed.

Seeing the king turn round, he bravely remained standing in an attitude of respect, because this man was a courtier; this was to be seen in his attitude even more than in the richness of his costume. Henri, greatly displeased with the noise made by this new-comer, whose garb was so insolently different from what he had ordered for that day, shot him a glance laden with reproach and displeasure. The gentleman pretended not to notice it, and stepping, with his creaking shoes, over a few stones on which were carved the effigies of departed bishops, he went and knelt near the velvet chair occupied by the Duc d'Anjou, who, absorbed in his thoughts, or rather, in his prayers, paid not the slightest attention to what was going on around him. However, when he felt the contact of this new personage, he turned quickly round and exclaimed, in a low voice,—

"Bussy!"

"Good-day, monseigneur," replied that gentleman, as though he had only left the duke the day before and nothing of importance had taken place since their parting.

"But are you mad?" said the prince to him.

"Why so, monseigneur?"

"To leave the place where you were, to come to Chartres and see Notre-Dame's chemises."

"Monseigneur," said Bussy, "I must speak to you at once."

"Why did you not come sooner?"

"Because that was an impossibility."

"But what has taken place during these three weeks of your disappearance?"

"This is exactly about what I wish to speak with you."

"Well, you will wait until we leave the church."

"Alas! I must, and that is what worries me."

"Hush! here is the end. Have patience and we shall go home together."

"I am counting on that, monseigneur."

In fact, the king had just passed Notre-Dame's coarse chemise over his own shirt of fine linen, and the queen, with the help of her women, was busy doing the same. The king then knelt down, and the queen followed his example. Each one stood for a moment under a large daïs, praying fervently, while all those present, in order to win the king's approval, bent down till their foreheads touched the ground. After which, the king removed the holy tunic, saluted the archbishop, then the queen, and went towards the cathedral door. But he stopped on the way; he had just caught sight of Bussy.

"Ah, monsieur," said he, "it seems that our devotions are not to your taste, since you cannot make up your mind to lay aside your velvets and silks when your king takes to sackcloth and serge."

"Sire," said Bussy, with dignity, while he turned pale beneath these words, "no one has your Majesty's welfare more at heart, even among those whose gowns are most

humble and whose feet are most torn ; but I have just returned from a long and fatiguing journey, and I only heard this morning of your Majesty's departure for Chartres. I therefore travelled twenty-two leagues in five hours to join your Majesty. This is why I did not have time to change my apparel,—a fact which would not have come beneath your Majesty's notice, if, instead of coming to humbly join my prayers to your own, I had remained in Paris."

The king seemed satisfied with this reason ; but as he looked at his friends, and some of them shrugged their shoulders at Bussy's words, he feared to displease them by seeming to favor his brother's gentleman, and passed on.

Bussy let him go by without moving.

" Well," said the duke, " do you not see ? "

" What ? "

" That Schomberg, Quélus, and Maugiron shrugged their shoulders at your excuse."

" Yes, monseigneur, I saw them," replied Bussy, with perfect calmness.

" Well ? "

" Well, do you think I am going to murder my fellow-creatures in a church ? I am too good a Christian for that."

" Ah, very good," said the Duc d'Anjou, surprised. " I thought you had not seen, or did not wish to see."

Bussy now shrugged his shoulders, and drawing the duke to one side as they left the church,—

" We go to your lodgings, monseigneur ? " he asked.

" At once. You must have a great deal to tell me."

" A great deal, monseigneur, and things which I am sure you do not suspect."

The duke looked at Bussy with astonishment.

" That is so," said the latter.

" Well, let me only salute the king, and I shall go with you."

The king took leave of his brother, who, being no doubt moved to leniency by his prayers to Notre-Dame,

granted the Duc d'Anjou permission to return to Paris when he should wish. Then, hastily returning to Bussy, they both retired to one of the rooms of the *hôtel* which had been assigned to him as a residence.

"Come, my friend," he said, "sit down and tell me about your adventure. Do you know, I believed you were dead."

"I am not surprised, monseigneur."

"Do you know that the court wore white as a sign of grief at your disappearance, and that a great many breathed freely for the first time, since you handle the word? But this is not the question. You left me to set out in pursuit of the fair unknown. Who was this woman, and what am I to expect?"

"You will reap what you have sown, monseigneur,—a great deal of shame."

"What?" said the duke, even more surprised at these strange words than at Bussy's disrespectful tone.

"You heard me, monseigneur," said Bussy, coldly; "it is therefore useless for me to repeat."

"Explain yourself, monsieur, and leave riddles for Chicot."

"Oh, nothing is easier, monseigneur; I shall simply appeal to your memory."

"But who is this woman?"

"I thought you had recognized her."

"Was it really she?" cried the duke.

"Yes, monseigneur."

"You have seen her?"

"Yes."

"Did she speak to you?"

"No doubt; it is only ghosts who do not speak. After all, Monseigneur had perhaps the right to believe her dead, and to hope she was."

The duke turned pale, and seemed crushed by these words of him who should have been his courtier.

"Well, yes, monseigneur," continued Bussy, "though you drove to martyrdom a young girl of noble race, this young girl escaped; but do not yet feel relieved, and

think yourself absolved, because, though retaining life she has found a misfortune greater than death."

"What is it? What has happened to her?" asked the duke, trembling.

"Monseigneur, a man saved her honor and her life but this man has made her pay so dearly for this service that it is to be regretted that he ever rendered it."

"Finish; tell me."

"Well, monseigneur, Mademoiselle de Méridor, to escape from the Duc d'Anjou whose mistress she would not be, has thrown herself into the arms of a man she abhors."

"What are you saying?"

"I say that Diane de Méridor now calls herself Madame de Monsoreau."

At these words, François' habitual pallor was superseded by a flush so sudden that the blood seemed about to start from his eyes.

"Blood of Christ!" cried the furious prince, "can that be true?"

"*Pardieu!* since I tell you so," replied Bussy haughtily.

"That is not what I meant," said the prince; "I did not suspect your loyalty, Bussy, I only asked myself how it was possible that one of my gentlemen, a Monsoreau should dare to protect against my love a woman whom I so honored."

"And why not?" said Bussy.

"Would you have done what he did?"

"I would have done better, monseigneur. I would have warned you that your honor was going astray."

"One moment, Bussy," said the prince, who had recovered his calmness; "listen, if you please. You understand that I do not justify myself."

"And you are wrong, prince, for you are but a man in all matters of honor."

"Well, this is why I wish you to judge M. de Monsoreau."

"I?"

"Yes, you ; and tell me if he is not a traitor,—a traitor to me."

"To you ?"

"To me, when he knew my intentions."

"And your intentions were—"

"To obtain Diane's love, of course."

"To obtain her love ?"

"Yes, but to have recourse to violence under no pretext."

"Were those your intentions, monseigneur ?" said Bussy, with an ironical smile.

"Yes, and I maintained those intentions to the very last, though M. de Monsoreau opposed them with all the logic of which he was capable."

"Monseigneur ! monseigneur ! what are you saying here ? Did that man urge you to dishonor Diane ?"

"Yes."

"By his advice ?"

"By his letters. Do you want to see one of his letters ?"

"Oh," cried Bussy, "if I could believe that !"

"Wait a second ; you shall see."

The duke ran to a little coffer which a page always guarded in his closet, and drew from it a note which he handed to Bussy.

"Read," said he, "since you doubt your prince's word."

Bussy took the note with a hand trembling with doubt, and he read :—

MONSIEUR,—Your Highness may be reassured ; the attack can be made without any risks, as the young person leaves to-night, to spend a week with an aunt who lives at the Château de Lude. I shall therefore take the affair in hand, and you need not worry about it. As to the young woman's scruples, rest assured that they will vanish when she finds herself in the presence of your Royal Highness. In the meantime, I shall act ; and to-night she will be at the Château de Beaugé.

Your Highness's very humble servant,

BRYAN DE MONSOREAU.

" Well, what do you say to that, Bussy ? " asked the prince, after the young man had read the letter a second time.

" I say that you are well served, monseigneur."

" On the contrary, I am betrayed."

" Ah, true ! I forgot the rest."

" Tricked ! the wretch ! He made me believe the death of a woman—"

" He was taking from you. But," added Bussy, with biting sarcasm, " M. de Monsoreau's love is an excuse."

" Ah, you think so ? " said the duke, with his most wicked smile.

" Well," replied Bussy ; " I have no opinion in the matter. I think so, if you do."

" What would you do in my place ? But, wait ; what did he himself do ? "

" He made the young girl's father believe that you were the ravisher. He offered his help ; he presented himself at the Château de Beaugé with a letter from Diane's father. Finally, he came in a boat and carried off the prisoner. Then, shutting her up in the house you know he frightened her into becoming his wife."

" And is this not infamous disloyalty ? " cried the duke.

" Sheltered behind your own," replied Bussy, with his usual boldness.

" Ah, Bussy, you shall see if I know how to avenge myself."

" Avenge yourself ! Come, monseigneur, you would not do such a thing."

" Why not ? "

" Princes do not avenge themselves, monseigneur they punish. You will accuse Monsoreau of his infamy and you will punish him."

" In what way ? "

" By restoring happiness to Mademoiselle de Méridor."

" But can I ? "

" Certainly."

" How so ? "

“ By setting her free.”

“ Come, explain yourself.”

“ Nothing is easier. The marriage was forced. It is herefore null and void.”

“ You are right.”

“ Have the marriage annulled, monseigneur, and you will have acted as a worthy gentleman and a noble prince.”

“ Ah, ah,” said the prince, suspiciously, “ what warmth! Does it interest you, Bussy?”

“ Me! not in the least. What interests me, monseigneur, is that it should not be said that Louis de Lermont, Comte de Bussy, serves a perfidious prince and a dishonorable man.”

“ Well, you shall see. But how can I break this marriage?”

“ Nothing is easier, if you make the father act.”

“ The Baron de Méridor?”

“ Yes.”

“ But he is in the depths of Anjou.”

“ He is here, monseigneur,—that is to say, in Paris.”

“ In your house?”

“ No, with his daughter. Speak to him, monseigneur, that he may count on you; that instead of seeing, as heretofore, an enemy in your Highness, he may see a protector; and he who called your name accursed, will adore you as his good genius.”

“ He is said to be a very influential man in his own province,” said the duke.

“ Yes, monseigneur; but you should remember above all that he is a father, that his daughter is unhappy, and that he is unhappy through her misfortune.”

“ When shall I be able to see him?”

“ So soon as you reach Paris.”

“ Very well.”

“ It is agreed, is it not, monseigneur?”

“ Yes.”

“ On your word as a gentleman?”

“ On my word as a prince.”

“ When do you leave here ? ”

“ To-night. Will you wait for me ? ”

“ No, I shall go ahead.”

“ Go and be prepared.”

“ At your orders, monseigneur. Where shall I find your Highness ? ”

“ At the king's levee, to-morrow, at noon.”

“ I shall be there, monseigneur ; adieu.”

Bussy did not lose a moment, and the distance which the duke, asleep in his litter, took fifteen hours to travel, the young man who returned to Paris with his heart throbbing with joy and love, did in five, the sooner to console the baron to whom he had promised assistance and Diane to whom he had given half his life.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

HOW CHICOT RETURNED TO THE LOUVRE AND WAS RECEIVED BY KING HENRI III.

IN the Louvre, all were still sleeping. It was only eleven o'clock in the morning, and the sentinels in the courtyard seemed to walk about with precautions. Even the horsemen who relieved the guard made their horse walk. The king, wearied after his pilgrimage, was resting.

Two men rode up to the principal gate of the Louvre, the one mounted on a barb of incomparable freshness, the other on an andalusian covered with foam. Both stopped in front of the gate and looked at each other. Having come from opposite directions, they had only met there.

“ Monsieur de Chicot,” cried the younger of the two, bowing politely, “ how are you this morning ? ”

“ Ah, it is the lord of Bussy. Very well, I thank you,” replied Chicot, with the ease and courtesy that denote the gentleman quite as well as Bussy's bow.

"Have you come to attend the king's levee, monsieur?" asked Bussy.

"You too, I presume?"

"No, I have come to salute Monseigneur the Duc d'Anjou. You know, Monsieur de Chicot," added Bussy, with a smile, "that I have not the good fortune to be numbered among his Majesty's favorites."

"That is a reproach that should be made to the king and not to you, monsieur."

Bussy bowed.

"Do you come from a long distance?" asked Bussy. I heard you were travelling."

"Yes, monsieur, I was hunting," replied Chicot. But were you not also away on a journey?"

"Yes, I went to the provinces. Now, monsieur," continued the count, "will you be kind enough to do me a favor?"

"Why, certainly. Monsieur de Bussy will confer a great honor on me if he will make use of me whenever the opportunity occurs."

"Well, you, the privileged man, will penetrate into the Louvre, whereas I shall be obliged to wait in the antechamber. Will you kindly send word to the Duc d'Anjou that I am here?"

"M. d'Anjou is at the Louvre, and will no doubt be present at his Majesty's levee; why do you not enter with me?"

"I fear the king's displeasure."

"Pshaw!"

"Well, heretofore I have not been favored with his most gracious smiles."

"Within a short time, all will be changed."

"Ah, ah, are you a necromancer, Monsieur de Chicot?"

"Sometimes. Come, have courage, Monsieur de Bussy."

They entered, and directed their footsteps, the one, towards the apartments which had formerly been occupied by Queen Marguerite and which were now those of the Duc d'Anjou, the other, towards the king's chamber.

Henri III. had just waked up and rung his large bell, at the sound of which a swarm of friends and attendant rushed into the room. The chicken broth, spiced wines and meat pies were already served when Chicot entered the presence of his august master, and before saluting him, began to eat out of the dish and drink out of the gold bowl.

“ *Par la mordieu !* ” cried the king, really delighted though he feigned anger. “ I believe it is that rascal Chicot, that fugitive, that vagabond.”

“ Well, well, what is the matter, my son ? ” asked Chicot, unceremoniously seating himself, with his dust boots, in the immense armchair in which Henri III. himself was seated. “ We forget our little return from Poland in which we played the part of the deer while the magnates played the part of the hounds.”

“ Ah, my tormentor has returned ! ” said Henri. “ Now I shall only hear disagreeable things. I have been very peaceful for the past three weeks.”

“ Pshaw ! ” said Chicot, “ you are always complaining. By the devil ! you might be taken for one of your own subjects. Come, what have you done during my absence, my little Henriquet ? Have we badly governed that beautiful kingdom of France ? ”

“ Monsieur Chicot ! ”

“ Are the people oppressed ? ”

“ Scamp ! ”

“ Have they hanged some of these curly headed little gentlemen ? Ah, I beg your pardon, Monsieur Quélus, I had not seen you.”

“ Chicot, we shall quarrel.”

“ Is there still a little money in your coffers or those of the Jews ? That would be lucky. We need little amusement. *Ventre de biche !* life is very dull.”

And he finished eating up all the gold-brown meat pies contained in the silver dish. The king began to laugh. That was always the way he ended.

“ Come,” said he, “ what have you done during the long absence ? ”

"I have imagined a little procession in three acts," said Chicot. "First Act: Penitents clad only in hose and hirts, pulling each other's hair and striking each other as they go from the Louvre to Montmartre. Second Act: the same penitents, uncovered to the waist and scourging each other with chaplets of thorns as they go from Montmartre to the Abbey of Sainte-Genevieve. Third Act: These same penitents, completely naked, carving and scourging each other as they return from the Abbey of Sainte-Genevieve to the Louvre. I thought it would be quite an unexpected incident to have them pass by the Place de Grève, where the executioner would burn them all from the first to the last; but I thought that as the Lord must have kept a little sulphur from Sodom and a little brimstone from Gomorrah, I would not deprive him of the pleasure of doing his own cooking.—Now, gentlemen, while awaiting the great day, let us muse ourselves."

"Now, tell me first, what became of you?" asked the king. "Do you know that I instituted a search for you through all the disreputable places of Paris?"

"Did you go carefully through the Louvre?"

"Some rake of a friend must have confiscated you."

"That would be impossible, Henri,—you have confiscated all the rakes."

"I was, then, mistaken?"

"Eh, *mon Dieu!* yes, entirely, as usual."

"We shall see that you do penance."

"Exactly; I went a little into religion to see how it was, and upon my word I have come back. I have enough of monks. Fie! the ugly animals."

At this moment M. de Monsoreau entered the room and bowed to the king with great respect.

"Ah, here you are, monsieur," said Henri. "When shall we have a fine hunt?"

"When it will please your Majesty. I have just received the news that we have a number of boars at Saint-Germain."

"Boars are dangerous," said Chicot. "King Charles

IX., as I remember, came very near being killed by a boar ; and then spears are hard and would hurt these tender little hands. Eh, my son ? ”

M. de Monsoreau looked askance at Chicot.

“ Well,” said the Gascon to Henri, “ it is not long since the master of the hounds met a wolf.”

“ Why so ? ”

“ Because, like the clouds of the poet Aristophanes, he has kept the face, and particularly the expression. It is striking.”

M. de Monsoreau turned round and grew pale as he said to the jester, —

“ Monsieur Chicot, I am but ill-accustomed to buffoons having lived at court very little ; but I warn you that I do not like to be humiliated before my king, particularly in matters that concern my duty to him.”

“ Well, monsieur,” said Chicot, “ you are just the opposite of us courtiers. We laughed at the last buffoonery.”

“ What was that buffoonery ? ” asked Monsoreau.

“ He appointed you master of the hounds. You see that if he is less of a buffoon than I, he is more of a fool.

Monsoreau shot a terrible glance at the Gascon.

“ Come, come,” said Henri, who foresaw a quarrel, “ let us speak of something else, gentlemen.”

“ Yes,” said Chicot, “ let us speak of the merits of Notre-Dame of Chartres.”

“ Chicot, do not be impious,” said the king, severely.

“ I, impious ? ” said Chicot. “ Come, now, you take me for a churchman, whereas I am a man of the sword. On the contrary, I shall warn you of one thing.”

“ And what is that ? ”

“ You are behaving very ill to Notre-Dame of Chartres — very ill.”

“ How so ? ”

“ No doubt Notre-Dame had two chemises accustomed to being together, and you have separated them. In your place I should have united them, and at that moment there might have been some chance for a miracle.”

This rather brutal allusion to the separation of the king and the queen made the king's friends laugh.

Henri stretched his arms, rubbed his eyes, and smiled.

" This time the fool is right, *mordieu !*" he said ; then he spoke of something else.

" Monsieur," said Monsoreau to Chicot, " will you kindly go and wait for me in the embrasure of that window ? "

" Certainly, monsieur," said Chicot, " with the greatest pleasure."

" Very well, let us draw to one side, if you will."

" Even to the depths of a forest if you would like, monsieur."

" A truce to jests ; they are useless as there is no one to laugh at them," said Monsoreau, joining the buffoon near the window, where the latter had preceded him.

We are face to face, and we owe each other the truth, monsieur Chicot, jester and buffoon. A gentleman forbids you,—do you hear this word ?—*forbids* you to laugh at him. He also invites you to reflect before you make appointments in the woods ; because in these woods of which you spoke just now, are to be found a collection of sticks worthy of following those with which you were nicely beaten in behalf of M. de Mayenne."

" Ah," said Chicot, without apparent emotion, though his dark eye flashed. " Ah, you remind me of all I owe M. de Mayenne. Would you like me to become your debtor as I am his ? Shall I place you on a level in my memory, and keep for you an equal part of my gratitude ? "

" It seems to me that you forget the principal one of our creditors, monsieur."

" I am surprised, monsieur, because I boast of having an excellent memory. Who may this creditor be, if you please ? "

" Maître Nicolas David."

" Oh, as for that one, you are mistaken," said Chicot, with a sinister laugh. " I owe him nothing ; he is paid."

At this moment a third party came and joined in the conversation. It was Bussy.

"Ah, Monsieur de Bussy," said Chicot, "come to my assistance. Here is M. de Monsoreau who has cornered me, and wishes to treat me as he would a deer; tell him that he is mistaken, and that he is dealing with a boar who will turn on the huntsman."

"Monsieur Chicot," said Bussy, "I believe you wrong the master of the hounds if you think he does not consider you what you are,—a worthy gentleman. Monsieur," continued Bussy, turning to the count, "I am sent to inform you that M. le Duc d'Anjou wishes to speak to you."

"To me?" said M. de Monsoreau, uneasily.

"Yes, to you, monsieur," said Bussy.

Monsoreau turned to the speaker with a glance which would have penetrated to the bottom of his soul but was forced to stop on the surface. Bussy's eyes and smile being so full of serenity.

"Do you accompany me, monsieur?" asked the master of the hounds.

"No, I shall hasten to tell his Highness of your coming while you take leave of the king;" and Bussy returned to the place from which he had come, deftly making his way through the crowd of courtiers. The Duc d'Anjou was standing in his study reading over the letter that we already know. Hearing a noise at the door, and believing it was Monsoreau, he hastily hid the paper. Bussy appeared,

"Well?" said the duke.

"Well, monseigneur, here he is."

"He suspects nothing?"

"What if he should suspect and be on his guard?" said Bussy. "Is he not your creature? Did you not raise him and can you not cast him down?"

"No doubt," replied the duke, with that preoccupied air he had on all occasions when he was called upon to display energy.

"Do you consider him less guilty than he was yesterday?"

"A hundred times more ; his crime is one of those that increase with reflection."

"Besides," said Bussy, "it may be summed up in this : He carried off, by treachery, a young girl of noble rank ; he married her fraudulently, and through means unworthy of a gentleman. He himself will ask that this marriage be annulled or you will ask for him."

"I have so decided."

"In the name of the father of the young girl, of the château de Méridor, of Diane ; I have your word."

"You have it."

"Remember that they are warned, that they are anxiously awaiting the result of your interview with this man."

"The young girl will be free, on my honor."

"Ah," said Bussy, "if you do that, you will really be a great prince, monseigneur," and he took the duke's hand,—that hand which had signed so many false promises,—and respectfully kissed it. Footsteps were first then heard in the vestibule.

"Here he is," said Bussy.

"Tell M. de Monsoreau to enter," cried François in a grave tone, which seemed to Bussy a good omen.

(And this time, the young gentleman, who was nearly sure of attaining his much wished for ends, could not help gazing Monsoreau with a little ironical haughtiness in his eyes. The master of the hounds received this glance with that expressionless gaze behind which were imprisoned the sentiments of his soul, as behind an impenetrable fortress.

Bussy awaited the result in that corridor that we already know,—in that same corridor where La Mole one night was nearly strangled by Charles IX., Henri III., the Duc d'Alençon, and the Duc de Guise. This corridor as well as the corresponding landing were, for the time being, crowded with gentlemen who came to pay their court to the prince.

Bussy took his place among them, and all hastened to make way for him, as much for his own self as for the

favor he enjoyed with the Duc d'Anjou. He kept all his sensations within himself, and without showing anything of the terrible anguish within his heart, he awaited the result of this interview on which the whole of his future happiness depended.

The conversation could not but be animated. Bussy had seen enough of M. de Monsoreau to understand that the latter would not yield without a struggle. But the Duc d'Anjou had only to place his hand on him, and if he would not bend—well, he must break. All at once the well-known sound of the prince's voice was heard. This voice seemed to command. Bussy was thrilled with joy.

"Ah," said he, "the duke is keeping his word."

But this sound was followed by no other, and all were silent, and looked uneasily at each other; a profound silence soon reigned among the courtiers. Uneasy, troubled, submitting to the ebb and flood of hope, Bussy felt the minutes drag for fully a quarter of an hour.

Suddenly, the door of the duke's chamber was opened and through the curtains could be heard the sound of joyous voices. Bussy knew that the duke was alone with the master of the hounds, and that if their conversation had followed its proper course, it ought to be anything but joyous at that moment. This cheerfulness made him shiver.

The voices now drew nearer, the *portière* was raised and Monsoreau came out backwards as he bowed. The duke conducted him to the threshold and said,—

"Adieu, my friend. It is a settled thing."

"My friend!" murmured Bussy. "Sang-dieu! what is the meaning of this?"

"Well, monseigneur," said Monsoreau, still turned towards the prince, "your Highness is of opinion that publicity is now the best method to pursue."

"Yes, yes," said the duke; "all these mysteries are childish."

"Therefore," said the master of the hounds, "this evening, I shall present her to the king."

"Come without fear; I shall have everything prepared."

The duke leaned towards the master of the hounds and hispered a few words.

"It is done, monseigneur," replied the latter.

Monsoreau saluted the duke a last time. François could not see Bussy, who was hidden behind a curtain which he clutched as a means of support, and examined all those present.

"Gentlemen," said Monsoreau turning towards the courtiers, who were waiting for their turn and who ready bowed before this favor beside which Bussy's new pale, "gentlemen, permit me to give you a piece of news. Monseigneur authorizes me to make public my marriage with Mademoiselle Diane de Méridor, who has been my wife for more than a month. I shall present her at court to-night beneath his auspices."

Bussy staggered; though the shock was no longer unexpected, it nearly crushed him. He then advanced his head, and the duke and he, both pale, though from different causes, exchanged a look,—of contempt on Bussy's part, and of terror on the duke's.

Monsoreau passed through the group of gentlemen amid a shower of compliments and congratulations.

As for Bussy, he made a motion to go to the duke, but the latter saw the movement and intercepted it by dropping the *portière*; at the same time, behind the *portière*, the door was heard to close, and the key grated in the lock. Bussy felt his blood surge to his head and to his heart. His hand found the dagger hanging at his belt and half drew it from the scabbard; for with this man, two passions followed a first irresistible impulse. But love, which had urged him to violence, paralyzed this fury. The bitter, deep, throbbing pain smothered his anger. Instead of swelling, his heart burst.

In this paroxysm of two passions struggling together, the young man's energy fell like those waves that rise heavenward and are quelled by striking against each other.

Bussy understood that if he remained there, he would offer the spectacle of his mad sorrow ; he followed the corridor, reached the secret staircase, left the Louvre through a postern, and jumping on his horse, galloped away in the direction of the Rue Saint-Antoine.

The baron and Diane awaited the answer promised by the young man ; they saw Bussy appear, pale and haggard, with blood-shot eyes.

" Madame," cried Bussy, " despise me, hate me ; I thought I was something in the world, and I am but an atom. I thought I could be good for something, and cannot even snatch out my heart. Madame, you are really the wife of M. de Monsoreau,—his recognized legitimate wife ; you are to be presented at court to-night. But I am a poor madman, or rather— Yes, as you said, Monsieur le Baron, it is the Duc d'Anjou who is a coward and a wretch."

Leaving the father and daughter horrified, mad with grief, intoxicated with rage, Bussy left the room, jumped on his horse, struck his spurs into his sides, and without knowing where he was going, he started, pressing his hand over his beating heart, and spreading terror on his way.

CHAPTER XXXV.

WHAT HAD TAKEN PLACE BETWEEN THE DUC D'ANJOU AND THE MASTER OF THE HOUNDS.

IT is time to explain the sudden change in the Duc d'Anjou's intentions towards M. de Monsoreau. The duke, when he received M. de Monsoreau, after his promise to his favorite, was in a mood most favorable to the latter's plan. His anger, always easy to raise, overflowed from a heart wounded in its two ruling passions. The duke had been wounded in his pride ; the fear of an outburst, threatened by Bussy in the name of M. Méridor, lashed François' anger even more furiously.

In fact, two sentiments of this nature produce by their combination terrible explosions when the heart which contains them, like those powder-saturated bombs, is so hermetically sealed that the compression increases the explosion.

M. d'Anjou therefore received the master of the hounds with that forbidding expression which made the stoutest hearts tremble, for all knew François' resources in matters of vengeance.

"Your Highness has sent for me?" said Monsoreau, very calmly, casting a glance at the tapestries, as if to demand of them an explanation of his master's plan. He was accustomed to deal with the prince, and could guess at the fire that burned beneath this tranquil appearance.

"Fear nothing, monsieur," said the duke, who had understood; "there is no one beneath these hangings. We may therefore talk openly and frankly."

Monsoreau bowed.

"You are a good servant, monsieur, and you are attached to my person?"

"I think so, monseigneur."

"I am sure of it, monsieur. You have often informed me of plots against me; you have aided me in my enterprises, often forgetting your interests, exposing your fee."

"Your Highness!"

"I know it. Even lately, I must remind you of the fact, as you have so much delicacy that never, even by an indirect allusion, do you recall past services,—lately, in that unfortunate adventure—"

"What adventure, monseigneur?"

"The carrying off of Mademoiselle de Méridor,—poor young girl!"

"Alas!" murmured Monsoreau, in such a way that his words might not really be considered an answer.

"You pity her, do you not?" said the latter, bringing him on firmer ground.

"Would you not pity her, monseigneur?"

"I? Oh, you know how I have regretted that fatal

caprice ! And it has taken all my friendship for you, all the habit I have of your good services, to make me forget that without you I would not have carried off that young girl."

Monsoreau felt the thrust.

" Well," said he to himself, " is it simply remorse ? "

" Monseigneur," he replied, " your natural kindness leads you to exaggerate. You have no more caused the death of the young girl than I."

" How so ? "

" Certainly you had no intention of carrying violence to the point of causing Mademoiselle de Méridor's death ?

" Oh, no ! "

" Then the intention absolves you, monseigneur. It is a misfortune, and such a one as may be caused every day by chance."

" And besides," added the duke, plunging his glance into Monsoreau's heart, " death has wrapped everything in its eternal silence."

There was so much vibration in the prince's voice that Monsoreau raised his eyes at once and said to himself,—

" This is not remorse."

" Monseigneur," he continued, " shall I speak frankly with your Highness ? "

" Why should you hesitate ? " at once replied the prince, with mingled astonishment and haughtiness.

" In fact," said Monsoreau, " I do not know why you should hesitate."

" What do you mean ? "

" Oh, monseigneur ! I mean that with a prince so eminent for his intelligence and the nobleness of his heart, frankness should enter into this conversation as the principal element."

" Should enter ! What do you mean ? "

" I mean that at the beginning your Highness did not see fit to speak frankly with me."

" Really ! " said the prince, with a burst of laughter which revealed a furious anger.

" Listen to me, monseigneur," said Monsoreau, very

umbly. "I know what your Highness wished to tell me."

"Speak, then."

"Your Highness, perhaps, wished to make me understand that Mademoiselle de Méridor is not dead, and that those who believe themselves her murderers may be spared all remorse."

"Oh, monsieur, you have taken your time before making that consoling reflection to me. On my word, you are a faithful servant! You saw me sad and dejected; you heard me speak of the dreams that haunted me since the death of that woman, and yet you let me live on in this way, when a mere doubt might have spared me so much suffering. How shall I qualify this conduct, sir?"

The duke uttered these words in an angry tone.

"Monseigneur," replied Monsoreau, "does your Highness accuse me?"

"Traitor!" cried the duke, making one step towards the master of the hounds. "I accuse you of having deceived me. You have taken from me the woman that I loved."

Monsoreau grew frightfully pale, but did not change his calm and haughty bearing.

"That is true," he said.

"Ah, that is true, the impudent knave!"

"Please lower your voice, monseigneur," said Monsoreau, with the same calmness. "You forget that you are speaking to a gentleman, and a good servant."

The duke began to laugh convulsively.

"A good servant to the king," continued Monsoreau, still unmoved after this terrible threat.

The duke stopped short.

"What do you mean?" he murmured.

"I mean, monseigneur," replied Monsoreau, with consequential gentleness, "that if you will listen to me, you will understand how I could take that woman since you yourself wished to have her."

The duke, stupefied by such audacity, found nothing to say.

" My only excuse is," humbly continued the master of the hounds, " that I loved Mademoiselle de Méridor ardently."

" So did I," replied François, with inexpressible dignity.

" It is true, monseigneur, you are my master ; but Mademoiselle de Méridor did not love you."

" And she loved you,—you ? "

" Perhaps," murmured Monsoreau.

" You lie ! you lie ! You forced her, as I would have done,—only I, the master, failed, while you, the servant, succeeded. I had only power, while you had treachery."

" Monseigneur, I loved her."

" What do I care ! "

" Monseigneur—"

" What ! threats, serpent ? "

" Monseigneur, take care !" said Monsoreau, lowering his head like a tiger about to spring. " I loved her, tell you ; and I am not one of your servants, as you say just now. My wife is mine, like my land, and no one can take her from me,—no, not even the king. Now, I wished to have this woman, and I took her."

" Really," said François, springing towards a silver bell on the table, " you took her ; well, you will give her up."

" You are mistaken, monseigneur," cried Monsoreau, bounding to the table to stop the duke. " Reject the evil intention to do me harm ; if you call, if you inflict on me a public insult—"

" You shall give up this woman, I tell you."

" Give her up—how ? She is my wife before God."

Monsoreau counted on the effect of these words, but the duke's irritated attitude did not change.

" If she is your wife before God," he said, " you shall give her up before man."

" He must know all," murmured Monsoreau.

" Yes, I know all. I shall break off this marriage, we

ou married a hundred times before all the gods who ave reigned in heaven."

" Ah, monseigneur, that is blasphemy."

" To-morrow Mademoiselle de Méridor shall be restored to her father ; to-morrow you shall be exiled. Within an hour you shall have sold your office of master of the ponds. These are my conditions. Take care, or I shall break you as I break this glass."

The prince took a magnificent cup of enamelled crystal, present from the archduke of Austria, and hurled it at Monsoreau, who was almost enveloped in the fragments.

" I shall not give up my wife ; I shall not sell my office ; I shall remain in France," replied Monsoreau, turning on François.

" You will not ? "

" No. I will ask my pardon of the King of France, of the anointed king of the Abbey of Sainte-Genevieve ; and his sovereign, so good, so noble, so happy in the Divine favor recently conferred on him, will not refuse the first request made to him."

Monsoreau had laid increasing stress on these terrible words ; the fire of his eyes passed into his speech. François turned deadly pale, stepped backwards, pushed the heavy tapestry over the door, then seizing Monsoreau by the hand stammered these words,—

" Well—well—count, this request. Speak lower ; I am listening."

" I shall speak humbly," replied Monsoreau, who had immediately recovered his calmness, " as befits your Highness's very humble servant."

François slowly walked around the vast chamber, looking behind the tapestry hangings. He seemed unable to realize that Monsoreau's words had not been heard.

" You were saying—" he asked.

" I was saying, monseigneur, that a fatal love was the cause of all. Love, noble lord, is the most imperious of passions. To make me forget that your Highness had

cast your eyes on Diane, I must have been no longer master of myself."

" It was treachery, count, as I told you."

" Do not overwhelm me, monseigneur. Here is the thought that came to me. I saw you rich, young, happy, the first prince of the Christian world."

The duke made a movement.

" You are that," murmured Monsoreau in François' ear ; " between you and supreme rank there is but a shadow, easy to dispel.—I saw all the splendor of your future, and compared this immense fortune with the little that I craved. Dazzled by your brilliancy, which almost kept me from seeing the poor little flower that desired, I said to myself, let us leave the prince to his brilliant dreams, his splendid projects. There lies his object ; I seek mine in the shadow. He will hardly notice my absence ; hardly will he miss the little pearl that steal from his royal crown."

" Count, count," said the duke, intoxicated, in spite of himself, with the glamor of this image.

" Will you forgive me, monseigneur ? "

At this moment the duke raised his eyes. He saw on the wall, hung with gilt leather, Bussy's portrait, which he liked to have before him as he had formerly liked to have La Mole's. The eye in this portrait flashed so proudly, the arm was so insolently curved on the hip, that the duke imagined he saw before him Bussy himself, stepping out of the wall to exhort him to courage.

" No ! " he said ; " I cannot forgive you. God is my witness that it is not for myself that I hold out. It is for a mourning father,—a father unworthily deceived, who claims his daughter ; because a woman forced to marry you cries vengeance on you ; because justice is the first duty of a prince."

" Monseigneur ! "

" It is the first duty of a prince, and I shall do justice."

" If justice be the first duty of a prince, gratitude is he first duty of a king."

" What are you saying ? "

" I say that a king ought never to forget the one to whom he owes his crown. Now, monseigneur— "

" Well ? "

" You owe your crown to me, sire ! "

" Monsoreau ! " cried the duke, with even greater error than for the first two attacks of the master of the sounds. " Monsoreau," he added in a low and trembling voice, " are you a traitor to the king as you were a traitor to the prince ? "

" I attach myself to those who sustain me, sire," continued the count, raising his voice.

" Wretch ! "

The duke again glanced at Bussy's portrait.

" I cannot," he said. " You are a man of honor, Monsoreau, you will understand that I cannot approve of what you have done."

" Why so, monseigneur ? "

" Because that would be an action unworthy of you and of me. Give up that woman. Ah, my dear count, make that sacrifice and I shall grant you all you may ask— "

" So your Highness still loves Diane de Méridor ? " asked Monsoreau, pale with jealousy.

" No, no ! I swear it, no ! "

" Well, then, what can be your motive ? She is my wife ; am I not a gentleman ? Has any one the right to pry into the secrets of my life ? "

" But she does not love you."

" What of that ? "

" Do that for me, Monsoreau— "

" I cannot."

" Then," said the duke, a prey to the most horrible perplexity, " then— "

" Reflect, sire ! "

The duke wiped from his brow the perspiration which the sound of this title had brought there.

" You would denounce me ? "

" To the king, dethroned for you, yes. If my new sovereign wounded me in my honor and happiness, I would return to the old one."

" It is infamous."

" True, sire ; but my love is strong enough to make me infamous."

" It is cowardly."

" Yes, your Majesty ; but my love is strong enough to make me a coward."

The duke took a step towards Monsoreau, who stopped him with a single glance and smile.

" You would gain nothing by killing me, monseigneur," he said ; " there are secrets which float with the corpses. Let us remain, you a king, full of clemency, and I the most humble of your subjects ! "

The duke crushed his fingers together and tore them with his nails.

" Come, come, my good prince, do something for the man who has served you best in all things."

François rose.

" What do you ask ? " he said.

" That your Majesty—"

" Wretch ! must I beseech you ? "

" Oh, monseigneur ! " and Monsoreau bowed.

" Speak," murmured François.

" Monseigneur, you will forgive me ? "

" Yes."

" You will reconcile me with M. de Méridor ? "

" Yes."

" You will sign my marriage contract with Mademoiselle de Méridor ? "

" Yes," said the duke, in a smothered voice.

" And you will honor my wife with a smile, the day she will appear before the queen, to whom I wish to have the honor of presenting her ? "

" Yes," said François. " Is this all ? "

" Absolutely all, monseigneur."

" You may go ; you have my word."

" And you," said Monsoreau, leaning over towards the

luke,—“ you will keep the throne on which I have placed you ! Farewell, sire.”

This time he murmured it so low that the sound of this word was like music to the prince.

“ Now,” thought Monsoreau, “ there remains for me to find out how the prince was informed.”

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE KING AND CHICOT.

HAT same day, M. de Monsoreau presented his wife to the queen-mother and to the queen, in accordance with the wish he had expressed to the Duc d’Anjou.

Henri, anxious as usual, had gone to bed, after being informed by M. de Morvilliers that he must summon a great council for the morrow. Henri did not even ask the chancellor any questions ; it was late, and his Majesty was sleepy. The most convenient hour was selected, so that neither his Majesty’s sleep nor his rest would be disturbed.

The worthy magistrate knew his master well, and was ware that, unlike Philip of Macedon, the king, if he were sleepy or fasting, would not listen with sufficient interest to the communications addressed to him.

He also knew that Henri, whose sleep was broken,—this is always the case with the man who must watch over the sleep of others,—would think during the night of the coming audience, and with a curiosity more or less alive, according to the gravity of circumstances.

All took place as M. de Morvilliers had foreseen.

After a first nap of three or four hours, Henri awoke ; the chancellor’s request returned to his mind. He sat up in bed, began to think, and tired of thinking alone, slipped down off his mattress, put on his silk trowsers, his stockings, and without changing anything in his night gear, which made him resemble a phantom, he walked out by the light of the lamp which, since the breath of the

Almighty had travelled to Anjou with Saint-Luc, was no longer extinguished. He walked, we say, towards Chicot's room, which was the same in which Mademoiselle de Brissac's marriage had been so happily concluded.

The Gascon slept soundly, and snored like bellows. Henri pulled him three times by the arm without succeeding in rousing him. The third time, however, the king, having accompanied the gesture with his voice, and screamed out Chicot's name, the Gascon opened one eye.

“ Chicot ! ” repeated the king.

“ What is the matter now ? ” asked the jester.

“ Eh ! my friend,” said Henri, “ how can you sleep thus, while your king watches ? ”

“ Ah, *mon Dieu !* ” cried Chicot, pretending not to recognize the king, “ has his Majesty got the indigestion ? ”

“ Chicot, my friend,” said Henri, “ it is I.”

“ Who are you ? ”

“ I,—Henri.”

“ Positively, my son, it is those woodcocks that smother you ; yet, I had warned you. You ate too many last night, as well as too much bisque.”

“ No,” said Henri ; “ I hardly tasted them.”

“ Then,” said Chicot, “ you have been poisoned. *Ventre de biche !* how pale you are, Henri ! ”

“ It is my linen mask, my friend,” said the king.

“ So you are not ill ? ”

“ No.”

“ Then why do you wake me up ? ”

“ Because of the sorrow that pursues me.”

“ You have sorrow ? ”

“ A great deal.”

“ So much the better.”

“ How, so much the better ? ”

“ Yes, sorrow brings reflection ; and you will reflect that you can only wake up an honest man at two o'clock in the morning if you wish to make him a present. Why have you brought me ? ”

“ Nothing, Chicot. I came to talk with you.”

“ It is not enough.”

“ Chicot, M. de Morvilliers came to court last evening.”

“ You receive very bad company. Henri, what wrought him ? ”

“ He came to request an audience.”

“ Ah, he is a man of breeding ; he is not like you, who enter a man’s room at two o’clock in the morning, without word of warning.”

“ What can he have to say to me, Chicot ? ”

“ What, you wretch ! ” cried the Gascon, “ did you wake me up to ask me that ? ”

“ Chicot, my friend, you know that M. de Morvilliers es to my police ? ”

“ No,” said Chicot, “ upon my word, I did not.”

“ Chicot,” said the king, “ I find, on the contrary, that de Morvilliers’ king is always well-informed.”

“ And when I think,” said the Gascon, “ that I might be sleeping instead of listening to all this nonsense ! ”

“ You doubt what the chancellor does ? ” asked Henri.

“ Yes, *corbœuf !* ” replied Chicot, “ and I have my reasons.”

“ What are they ? ”

“ If I give you one, will it suffice ? ”

“ Yes, if it be a good one.”

“ And you will leave me alone after that ? ”

“ Certainly.”

“ Well, one day—no, it was one night.”

“ No matter.”

“ On the contrary, it matters a great deal. Well, one night I beat you in the Rue Froidmentel. You had with you Quélus and Schomberg—”

“ You beat me ? ”

“ Yes, caned you,—caned you all three.”

“ About what ? ”

“ You had insulted my page ; you received the blows, and M. de Morvilliers told you nothing about it.”

“ What ! ” cried Henri ; “ it was you, you scoundrel ! was sacrilege ! ”

"It was I," said Chicot, rubbing his hands. "Do not strike well, my son, when I am started?"

"Wretch!"

"You acknowledge that I speak the truth?"

"I shall have you flogged, Chicot."

"That is not the question; is it true, yes or no? I ask nothing more."

"You know very well that it is true, you rascal!"

"Did you send the next day for M. de Morvilliers?"

"Yes, and you were there when he came."

"Did you tell him about the unpleasant accident that had befallen one of your friends the night before?"

"Yes."

"Did you order him to find the culprit?"

"Yes."

"Did he find him?"

"No."

"Well, go to bed, Henri; you see that your police is worth nothing."

And turning towards the wall, without another word, he began to snore with a noise of heavy artillery which took away from the king all hope of waking him from that second sleep.

Henri went to his room with a sigh, and for want of another interlocutor, began to deplore to his greyhound Narcissus the misfortune of kings who never learn the truth save at their own expense.

The next morning the council was assembled. The varied with the king's changeable friendships. This time it was composed of Quélus, Maugiron, D'Epernon, and Schomberg, who had all four been in favor for over six months.

Chicot, seated at the head of the table, was making paper boats and arranging them methodically to make, he said, a fleet for his Most Christian king, in imitation of that of his Most Catholic Majesty.

M. de Morvilliers was announced.

The statesman had donned his most sombre clothing and assumed his most funereal air. After a deep bow,

which was returned by Chicot, he approached the king.

"Am I," said he, "before his Majesty's council?"

"Yes, before my best friends. Speak."

"Well, sire, I take the assurance, and I need it; I have come to denounce a very terrible plot to your Majesty."

"A plot!" cried all those present.

Chicot raised his head and suspended the manufacture of a superb double-decked galley, which was to be the flagship of the fleet.

"Yes, sire, a plot," said M. de Morvilliers, lowering his voice, with that mystery which is always the forerunner of terrible confidences.

"Oh, oh," said the king; "come, is it a Spanish plot?"

At this moment, M. le Duc d'Anjou, who had been summoned to the council, entered the room, and the doors were immediately closed.

"Do you hear, brother?" said Henri, after the usual ceremonies. "M. de Morvilliers has discovered a plot against the State."

The duke threw on those gentlemen present that clear and suspicious glance that we know so well.

"Is it possible?" he murmured.

"Alas! yes, monseigneur," said M. de Morvilliers, "a dangerous plot."

"Tell us about it," replied Chicot, putting his finished alleys in the crystal basin on the table.

"Yes," murmured the Duc d'Anjou, "tell us, monsieur."

"I am listening," said Henri.

The chancellor took his softest voice, his most obvious pose, his most important look.

"Sire," he said, "for a long time I have been keeping my eye on a few discontented spirits."

"Oh," said Chicot, "a few? You are very modest, M. de Morvilliers."

"They were," continued the chancellor, "men of low degree,—shopkeepers, tradespeople, or petty lawyers;

there were, here and there, a few students and priests."

"These are not very great princes," said Chicot, with perfect tranquillity, beginning on a new ship. The Duc d'Anjou forced a smile.

"You will see, sire," said the chancellor. "I know that discontented men always take advantage of two principal occasions,—war and religion."

"Very sensible," said Henri; "what next?"

The chancellor, delighted with this praise, continued:

"In the army I had officers devoted to your Majesty who kept me informed of everything; in religion it is more difficult. I therefore sent out some men."

"This is still very sensible," said Chicot.

"And finally," continued Morvilliers, "my agents succeeded in persuading one of the men of the provostship of Paris—"

"To do what?" asked the king.

"To watch the preachers who go about exciting the people against your Majesty."

"Oh, oh," thought Chicot, "does our friend happen to be known?"

"These people receive their inspirations, not from God but from a party very hostile to the crown. I have studied this party."

"Very good," said the king.

"Very sensible," said Chicot.

"And I know its hopes," triumphantly added Morvilliers.

"That is superb!" cried Chicot.

The king made a sign to the Gascon to be silent. The Duc d'Anjou did not lose sight of the orator.

"For more than two months," said the chancellor, "I have had in your Majesty's service men of great skill, or proved courage,—of insatiable greed, it is true, but I made this greed turn to the king's advantage; for though I paid them munificently, I learned through them that for a large sum of money I should be informed of the first meeting of the conspirators."

" This is good," said Chicot ; " pay, my king, pay."

" Why not ? " cried Henri. " Come, chancellor, let us now the object of this conspiracy, the hope of the conspirators."

" Sire, they want nothing short of a second St. Bartholomew."

" Against whom ? "

" Against the Huguenots."

The councillors looked at each other in surprise.

" About how much did that cost you ? " asked Chicot.

" Seventy-five thousand crowns on the one hand, a hundred thousand on the other."

Chicot turned to the king.

" If you wish it," he said, " I will tell you M. de Morvillier's secret for one thousand crowns."

The latter made a gesture of surprise, while the Duc d'Anjou bore up better than might have been expected.

" Tell it," said the king.

" It is the League, pure and simple," said Chicot,— the league begun ten years ago. M. de Morvilliers has discovered what every Parisian shopkeeper knows like is A B C."

" Monsieur ! " interrupted the chancellor.

" I speak the truth, and I shall prove it," cried Chicot, in a lawyer's tone.

" Then tell me the place of meeting of the Leaguers."

" Very willingly ; first, the public squares ; second, the public squares ; third, the public squares."

" Monsieur Chicot is jesting," said the chancellor, with sour face ; " and their rallying sign ? "

" They are dressed as Parisians, and move their legs when they walk," gravely replied Chicot.

A general burst of laughter greeted this explanation. M. de Morvilliers thought it would be in good taste to join in the general mirth, and he laughed too. But becoming serious,—

" Well," he said, " my spy was present at one of their meetings in a place which M. Chicot does not know."

The Duc d'Anjou turned pale.

“ Where ? ” asked the king.

“ In the Abbey of Sainte-Genevieve ! ”

Chicot dropped a paper chicken which he was putting on board the admiral’s galley.

“ The Abbey of Sainte-Genevieve ! ” said the king.

“ Impossible ! ” murmured the duke.

“ It is so,” said Morvilliers, satisfied with the effect he had produced, and looking triumphantly around at the assembly.

“ And what have they done ? What have they decided ? ” asked the king.

“ That the Leaguers would appoint chiefs, that all those enrolled would take arms, that each province should receive an envoy of the insurrectional police, that all his Majesty’s beloved Huguenots,—this is their expression—”

The king smiled.

“ —should be massacred on a given day.”

“ Is that all ? ” asked Henri.

“ *Peste !* ” said Chicot, “ it is easy to see that you are a Catholic.”

“ Is that all ? ” asked the duke.

“ No, monseigneur—”

“ *Peste !* I should think it was not all. If we only had that for 175,000 crowns, the king would be basely swindled.”

“ Speak, chancellor,” said the king.

“ There are chiefs—”

Chicot saw the duke’s doublet agitated above his heart.

“ Well, well, well,” he said, “ a plot with chiefs is surprising. Still we must have something for our 175,000 crowns.”

“ These chiefs—their names ? ” asked the king.

“ First, a preacher, a fanatic, a demoniac, whose name I bought for ten thousand crowns.”

“ And you did right.”

“ Brother Gorenflot, of the order of Sainte-Genevieve.”

“ Poor devil ! ” said Chicot, with true commiseration. “ It was said that this adventure would bring him to no good.”

"Gorenfot!" said the king, writing down the name.
"Well, what next?"

"Next—" said the chancellor, with hesitation, "but, sire, that is all—"

And Morvilliers looked around at the assembly with an inquisitive and mysterious glance which seemed to say, "If your Majesty were alone, you would know a great deal more."

"Speak, chancellor, I have only friends here—speak."

"Oh, sire, the one I hesitate to name also has very powerful friends—"

"Near me?"

"Everywhere."

"Are they more powerful than I?" cried Henri, pale with anger and uneasiness.

"Sire, a secret cannot be spoken aloud. Excuse me, I am a statesman."

"That is true."

"It is very sensible," said Chicot. "We are all statesmen."

"Monsieur," said the Duc d'Anjou, "we shall present our very humble respects to the king if the communication cannot be made in our presence."

M. de Morvilliers hesitated. Chicot watched every gesture, fearing lest the chancellor, simple though he seemed to be, should have succeeded in discovering something less simple than his first revelations. The king made a sign to the chancellor to draw near, while the Duc d'Anjou remained seated. Chicot was silent, and the four favorites averted their attention.

M. de Morvilliers immediately leaned towards his Majesty's ear, but he had only made half the movement demanded by etiquette when a great clamor rose from the courtyard of the Louvre. The king drew himself up, MM. de Quélus and d'Epernon rushed to the window, M. d'Anjou laid his hand on his sword, as if all this threatening noise had been directed against him. Chicot, standing on tiptoe, could see both the courtyard and the room.

"Look! M. de Guise," he was the first to cry out.
"M. de Guise is entering the Louvre!"

The king made a movement.

"That is true," said the gentlemen.

"The Duc de Guise?" stammered M. d'Anjou.

"This is queer, is it not, that the Duc de Guise should be in Paris?" slowly said the king, who had just read in M. de Morvillier's almost stupefied glance, the answer that the latter had been about to make him.

"Did the communication you were about to make me have any reference to my cousin of Guise?" he asked the magistrate, in a low voice.

"Yes, sire, it was he who presided at the meeting," replied the chancellor in the same tone.

"And the others?"

"I know no others."

Henri consulted Chicot with a glance.

"*Ventre de biche!*" cried the Gascon, assuming a royal attitude: "admit my cousin of Guise!" And leaning toward Henri, "Here is one," he said in a whisper, "whose name you know well enough to have no need to write it down on your tablets."

The ushers noisily opened the doors.

"Only one door, gentlemen," said Henri, "only one door! The two are for the king."

The Duc de Guise was near enough to hear these words, but they made no change in the smile with which he had resolved to approach the king.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

WHY M. DE GUISE CAME TO THE LOUVRE.

BEHIND M. de Guise came a large number of officers, courtiers, and gentlemen; behind this escort came the people,—a less brilliant but surer and more formidable one. Only the gentlemen had entered the palace and the people had remained at the door.

The cries came from their ranks, and they had not ceased shouting though the duke had disappeared from view to enter the gallery.

At the sight of this sort of army which escorted the Parisian hero every time he appeared in the streets, the guards had taken up their arms, and ranged in line behind their brave colonel, shot threatening glances at the people, and solemn provocations at the hero.

Guise had noticed the attitude of these soldiers commanded by Crillon ; he had graciously bowed to the colonel who, sword in hand, stood four steps from his men, and who remained stiff and motionless in his disdain.

This revolt of a man and of a regiment against his generally established power, struck the duke. His brow became clouded ; but as he approached the king, it cleared ; so much so, that when he reached Henri III.'s room, he entered smiling.

"Ah, it is you, cousin," said the king. "What a noise you bring with you ! Are not the trumpets sounding ? I thought I heard them."

"Sire," replied the duke, "trumpets sound in Paris only for the king, and in campaign only for the general ; and I am too familiar both with the court and the camp to be mistaken. Here, the trumpets would make too much noise for a subject ; there, they would not make enough for a prince."

Henri bit his lips.

"*Par la mordieu !*" he said, after a silence spent in scrutinizing the Lorraine prince, "you are very brilliant, my cousin. Have you arrived from the siege of La Charité only to-day ?"

"Yes, only to-day, sire," replied the prince, flushing slightly.

"Faith ! your visit to us is a great honor,—a great honor, a great honor."

Henri repeated his words when he had too many ideas to hide, as the soldiers are massed before a battery which is only to be uncovered at a certain moment.

"A great honor," repeated Chicot, with such an exact

intonation that one might have thought that these words were spoken by the king.

"Sire," said the duke, "your Majesty is no doubt jesting. How can my visit be an honor for him from whom all honor comes?"

"I mean, Monsieur de Guise," replied Henri, "that all good Catholics are in the habit, on returning from a campaign, to visit God first in one of his temples; the king comes only after God. Honor God, serve the king, is, you know, a half religious, half political axiom."

The Duc de Guise's heightened color now became more distinct; the king, who looked him full in the face as he spoke, saw the flush, and his glance, by an instinctive movement, passed from the Duc de Guise to the Duc d'Anjou, and he saw with surprise that his brother was as pale as the duke was red.

He was struck by this emotion which betrayed itself in such opposite ways. He affected to look away, took an affable air, beneath which no one knew better than Henri III. how to hide his royal claws.

"At all events, duke, nothing equals my joy in seeing that you have escaped all the evil chances of war, which, I am told, you seek in the rashest manner. But danger knows you, and avoids you," he added.

The duke bowed at this compliment.

"But let me tell you, cousin, not to be so ambitious of mortal perils; for it would, in truth, be very hard for us sluggards who sleep, eat, and hunt, and whose only conquests consist in new fashions and new prayers."

"Yes, sire," said the duke, replying to the last words, "we all know that you are an enlightened and pious prince, and that no pleasures can make you lose sight of the glory of God and the interests of the Church. This is why we have come to your Majesty with so much confidence."

"Look at the confidence of your cousin, Henri," said Chicot, pointing to the gentlemen, who had respectfully remained outside of the room; "he has left one-third in

your ante-chamber and the other two-thirds at the gate of the Louvre."

"With confidence?" repeated Henri. "Do you not always come to me with confidence, my cousin?"

"Understand me, sire; the confidence of which I speak, has reference to a proposition I am about to make."

"Ah, ah, you have something to propose? Then speak with confidence, as you say,—with all confidence. What have you to propose?"

"The execution of one of the most beautiful ideas that has moved the Christian world since the Crusades have become impossible."

"Speak, duke."

"Sire," continued the duke, raising his voice so as to be heard in the ante-chamber, "Sire, the title of Most Christian King is not a vain one; it requires in its possessor an ardent zeal for religion. The eldest son of the Church—that is your title, sire—should always be ready to defend his mother."

"Look," said Chicot, "my cousin is preaching with sword and helmet; that is queer! I am no longer astonished that monks should wish to make war. Henri, give me a regiment for Gorenfot."

The duke pretended not to hear. Henri crossed his legs, rested his elbow on his knee, and his chin in his hand.

"Is the Church threatened by the Saracens, my dear duke," he asked, "or do you aspire to the title of King of Jerusalem?"

"Sire," replied the duke, "this great concourse of people who followed me calling down blessings on my name, only did so to repay me for the ardor of my zeal in the defence of the faith. Before your accession to the throne, I already had the honor to speak to your Majesty of a project of alliance between all true Catholics."

"Yes, yes," said Chicot; "yes, I remember. The League, *ventre de biche!* Henri, the League by St. Bartholomew; really, my son, you are forgetful not to remember."

The duke turned round at the sound of these words and cast a disdainful glance on him who had uttered them, not knowing how much weight these words would have on the mind of the king, already laden with M. de Morvilliers' recent revelations.

The Duc d'Anjou, pale, and silent as the statue of Circumspection, placed his finger on his lips and looked fixedly at the Duc de Guise. This time the king did not observe the signs of intelligence between the two princes ; but Chicot, leaning over under pretext of putting one of his paper chickens in the ruby chain of his cap, whispered to him,—

“Look at your brother.”

In a second, Henri raised his eyes. The duke's finger was quickly lowered ; but not so quickly, however, that the king did not see the motion and guess the recommendation.

“Sire,” continued the Duc de Guise, who had seen Chicot's actions but had not heard his words, “the Catholics have, in truth, called this association the Holy League, and its principal object is to fortify the throne against the Huguenots, its mortal enemies.”

“Well said !” cried Chicot. “I approve *pedibus et nutu.*”

“But,” continued the duke, “it is not sufficient to form an association, a body, however compact it may be ; some direction must be given. Now, in a kingdom like France, several millions of men cannot assemble without the consent of the king.”

“Several millions of men !” said Henri, making no effort to hide a surprise which might reasonably be called fright.

“Several millions of men,” repeated Chicot,—“a small number of malcontents, which, under skilful management (of which I have no doubt), may bring forth pretty results.”

This time the duke's patience seemed to have reached its limits ; he pressed his scornful lips, but not daring to stamp his foot, said,—

" I am astonished that your Majesty should suffer these frequent interruptions when I have the honor of speaking to you on such important subjects."

Chicot, who seemed to feel all the justness of this remark, looked around with furious eyes, and imitating the voice of the usher,—

" Silence there ! " he cried. " *Ventre de biche !* silence I say."

" Several millions of men ! " resumed the king, who could scarcely credit the number. " This is flattering for the Catholic religion ; but in the face of several millions of associates, how many Protestants are there in my kingdom ? "

The duke seemed to reflect.

" Four," said Chicot.

This new sally made the king's friends laugh out loud, while the Duc de Guise knit his brow and the gentlemen in the ante-chamber murmured loudly against the Gascon's audacity. The king turned slowly towards the door whence came these murmurs, and, as Henri's look could be full of dignity when he wished it, the murmurs ceased. Then looking at the duke with the same expression,—

" Come, monsieur," he said, " what do you ask ? To the point,—to the point ! "

" I wish, sire,—for the popularity of my king is dearer to me than my own,—I wish your Majesty to show clearly that you are superior to us in your zeal for the Catholic religion as in all other things, and thus take from the discontented every *prétext* for beginning war again."

" Ah, if it is only a question of war, my cousin," said Henri, " I have troops ; even under your command, in the camp from which you have just come to give me this excellent advice, you have, I believe, nearly twenty-five thousand men."

" Sire, when I speak of war, I ought perhaps to explain myself."

" Explain yourself, my cousin ; you are a great captain,

and it will afford me much pleasure to hear you discourse on these topics."

"Sire, I meant to say that at the present time the kings are called upon to sustain two wars,—moral war, if I may so express myself, and political war; war against ideas and war against men."

"*Mordieu!*" cried Chicot, "that is powerfully expounded."

"Silence, fool!" said the king.

"Men," continued the duke, "are visible, palpable, mortal. You can meet, attack, and defeat them; and when they are defeated, you may try them and hang them, or do better."

"Yes," said Chicot, "hang them without trial,—it is shorter and more royal."

"But ideas," continued the duke, "cannot be opposed in this manner. They glide unseen, and hide from those who wish to destroy them. Concealed in the depths of the soul, they throw out deep roots. The more you prune the branches which imprudently appear, the more powerful and inextirpable become the roots below. An idea, sire, is a dwarf giant which must be watched night and day, because the idea which crawled yesterday at your feet will be above your head to-morrow. An idea, sire, is a spark falling on the hay. There is need of good eyes to discover the beginning of the conflagration, and for this reason, sire, millions of spies are necessary."

"Here are the four Huguenots of France given over to the devil," cried Chicot. "*Ventre de biche!* I pity them."

"And it is in order to provide for this watchfulness," continued the duke, "that I propose to your Majesty that you appoint a chief for the Holy Union."

"Have you spoken, my cousin?" asked Henri.

"Yes, sire, and without circumlocution, as your Majesty may have perceived."

Chicot heaved a tremendous sigh, while the Duc d'Anjou, having recovered from his fright, smiled on the Lorraine prince.

" Well," said the king to those who surrounded him, what do you think of this, gentlemen ? "

Chicot, without making any reply, took his hat and gloves, and taking a lion's skin by the tail, he dragged it into one corner of the apartment and lay down on it.

" What are you doing, Chicot ? " asked the king.

" Sire, they say that night brings good counsel. Why do they say that ? Because we sleep at night ; therefore am going to sleep, and to-morrow I will reply to my cousin of Guise," and he stretched himself to the very laws of the animal.

The duke shot a furious glance at the Gascon, who opened one eye and replied by a thundering snore.

" Well, sire," asked the duke, " what does your Iajesty think ? "

" I think that you are right as usual, my cousin. Call together the principal Leaguers ; come at their head, and shall choose the man who will be fit for the place."

" When, sire ? "

" To-morrow."

As he uttered this last word, he carefully divided his mile. The Duc de Guise had the first half, the Duc d'Anjou the second. The latter was about to withdraw with the court, but at the first step he took with that intention, the king stopped him.

" Remain, brother," he said. " I wish to speak to ou."

The Duc de Guise put his hand to his brow, as though to press down the surging thoughts, and followed by his suite, disappeared beneath the arches.

The next moment were heard the cries of the mob who greeted his reappearance.

Chicot still snored, but we would not say that he slept.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

CASTOR AND POLLUX.

THE king had dismissed his favorites while he kept his brother. The Duc d'Anjou, who, during the whole of the preceding scene, had managed to preserve a composed attitude, except in the eyes of Chicot and of the Duc de Guise, accepted Henri's invitation without distrust. He had no knowledge of the glance sent him by the king at the Gascon's instigation, and which had surprised his tell-tale finger too near his lips.

"Brother," said Henri, after having assured himself that, with the exception of Chicot, no one had remained in the room, "do you know that I am a very happy prince?"

"Sire, if your Majesty be really happy, it is a recompense of heaven for your merit."

Henri looked at his brother.

"Yes, very happy," he continued; "for if great ideas do not come to me, they come to my subjects. Now, this is a great idea which has just occurred to my cousin the Duc de Guise."

The Duc d'Anjou nodded in assent. Chicot opened one eye, as if he could not hear well with both eyes close, and must see the king's face to understand the sense of his words.

"Indeed," said Henri, "to unite all the Catholics under one banner, turn the kingdom into the Church, arm the whole of France from Calais to Languedoc, from Brittany to Burgundy, so that I shall always have an army ready to march against England, Flanders, or Spain, without alarming any of them,—do you know, François, it is a magnificent idea?"

"Is it not, sire?" said the Duc d'Anjou, delighted to see that the king's views coincided with those of the Duc de Guise, his ally.

"Yes, I confess that I feel greatly prompted to reward the author of this fine project."

Chicot opened both eyes, but shut them again, for he had seen on the king's face one of those smiles, visible to him alone, who knew Henri better than any one else, and this smile sufficed.

"Yes," continued the king, "I repeat it; such a project deserves a recompense, and I will do all I can for him who conceived it. Is it really the Duc de Guise who is the originator of this fine idea, or rather of this fine work,—for the work is begun, is it not, brother?"

The Duc d'Anjou indicated by a smile of assent that the execution of the project had already begun.

"Better and better," said the king. "I said that I am happy prince; I should have said too happy, François. My subjects not only conceive these ideas, but in their gerness to be of use to me, their king and cousin, hasten to carry them into execution. But I have already asked you, my dear François," continued the king, laying his hand on his brother's shoulder, "I have already asked you I am really indebted to the Duc de Guise for this royal thought."

"No, sire, it had already occurred to the Cardinal de Lorraine more than twenty years ago, and only the St. Bartholomew prevented its execution, or rather made it momentarily useless."

"Ah, what a pity that the Cardinal de Lorraine should be dead!" said Henri. "I should have made him Pope before the death of his Holiness Gregory XIII.; but," continued Henri, with that admirable simplicity which made him the best comedian of his kingdom, "his nephew has, nevertheless, inherited the idea, and brought it to bear. Unfortunately, I cannot make him Pope, but I shall make him—What can I do for him that is not already done, François?"

"Sire," said François, completely deceived by his brother's words, "you exaggerate his merits. The idea, as I said, was but an inheritance; and another man has greatly aided him in developing this inheritance."

"His brother the cardinal?"

"Doubtless he has aided, but I do not mean him."

“ Is it Mayenne ? ”

“ Oh, sire,” said the duke, “ you do him too much honor.”

“ Very true. How could any political idea come to that butcher ? But to whom, then, do I owe gratitude for this aid given to my cousin Guise ? ”

“ To me, sire.”

“ To you ! ” said Henri, as if in amazement.

Chicot opened one eye, the duke bowed.

“ What ? ” said Henri, “ when I saw the whole world unchained against me,—the preachers against my vices, the poets and pamphleteers against my ridicules, the politicians against my faults ; while my friends laughed at my powerlessness, and my situation became so perplexing that I lost flesh and my hair turned gray, such an idea came to you, François,—to you, whom, I confess (ah man is weak and kings are blind !), I did not always look upon as my friend. Ah, François, how guilty I have been ! ” And Henri, moved to tears, held out his hand to his brother.

Chicot opened his eyes again.

“ Oh,” continued Henri, “ the idea is triumphant. Not being able to levy taxes or raise troops without causing an outcry, not being able to walk, sleep, or love without exciting ridicule, this idea of M. de Guise,—or rather yours, brother,—gives me at once an army, money, friends, and rest. Now, for this rest to last, François one thing is necessary.”

“ What is it ? ”

“ My cousin spoke just now of appointing a chief for all this great movement.”

“ Yes, doubtless.”

“ This chief, you understand, François, cannot be any of my favorites. Not one of them has the head and heart necessary for so great a post. Quélus is brave, but thinks only of his love affairs. Maugiron is brave, but his vanity allows him to think of nothing but dress. Schomberg is also brave, but he is not clever,—even his best friends are forced to admit that. D'Epernon too is

rave, but he is an arrant hypocrite whom I would not trust for one instant, although I am always friendly to him. But you know, François," said the king, with increasing effusiveness, "one of the heaviest tasks on a king is this constant necessity for dissimulation; therefore, when I can speak freely from the heart, as I do now, I breathe."

Chicot closed both eyes.

" Well, I was saying," continued Henri, " that if my cousin Guise was the originator of this idea, to the development of which you have so powerfully contributed, François, the execution of it belongs to him."

" What are you saying, sire?" cried François, uneasily.

" I say that to direct such a movement we must have a great prince."

" Take care, sire!"

" A good general, a skilful negotiator."

" Particularly the latter," said the duke.

" Well, François, is not M. de Guise in every respect suitable for this post?"

" Brother," said François, " the duke is already very powerful."

" Yes, no doubt; but his power makes my strength."

" The Duc de Guise holds the army and the *bourgeoisie*, the Cardinal de Lorraine holds the church. Mayenne is an instrument in the hands of both brothers. It is a great deal of power concentrated in a single family."

" True," said Henri; " I had already thought of that."

" If the Guises were French princes, that might be one. Their interest would be to aggrandize the house of France."

" No doubt, but they are on the contrary Lorraine princes."

" Of a house always rival to ours."

" Yes, François, you have just touched the sore. *Dieu!* I did not believe you to be so good a politician; well, yes, this is what makes my hair turn gray. I note the elevation of this rival house, day by day. You are right, these three brothers hold everything in their hands,

and hardly a day passes that one or the other of these Guises, either by cunning or force, does not snatch from me some particle of my power, some portion of my prerogatives, while I, poor, lonely, and weak as I am, can do nothing to retaliate. Ah, François, if we had had this explanation sooner, had I been able to read in your heart as I do now, certain of support in you, I might have resisted better than I have done ; but now it is too late."

" Why so ? "

" Because it would be a struggle, and all struggle weary me. I shall, therefore, appoint him chief of the League."

" You will do very wrong, brother."

" But whom could I name, François ? Who would accept this perilous post ? Yes, perilous. Do you not see what was the duke's idea ? He wanted me to appoint him chief."

" Well ? "

" Well, should I name any one else to the post, he would become his enemy."

" Name some one so powerful that, supported by you he will have nothing to fear from the three Lorrain princes, united."

" Well, my good brother," said Henri, in a tone of dejection, " I know no one in these conditions."

" Look around you, sire."

" Around me, I see only you and Chicot who are really my friends."

" Oh, oh," murmured Chicot, " does he meditate playing me some trick ? " and he again closed both eyes.

" Well," said the duke, " do you not understand brother ? "

Henri looked at the Duc d'Anjou as if a veil had just been torn from his eyes.

" What ? " he cried.

François nodded.

" But no," said Henri, " you will never consent François. The task would be too hard a one. You could surely not accustom yourself to drill all these

purgeois ; you would not take the trouble to look over the sermons of their preachers. In case of a battle, you could not play the butcher in the streets of Paris, transformed into a slaughter-house. For all this, one must be triple, like M. de Guise, and have a right arm called Charles, and a left arm called Louis. Now, the duke did his share of killing on St. Bartholomew's Day."

" He killed only too well, sire."

" Yes, perhaps. But you are not answering my question, François. What ! you would like to follow that trade ? You would rub against their dented cuisses, and the pots they wear in lieu of helmets ? What ! you would make yourself popular,—you, the supreme gentleman of our court ? *Mort de ma vie !* how people hang with age ! "

" Perhaps I would not do this for myself, brother, but I would do it for you."

" Good, excellent brother," said Henri, wiping away a tear which had never existed.

" Then," said François, " you would not be displeased to see me assume the post you intended for M. de Guise ? "

" Displeased ! " cried Henri. " *Corne du diable !* no, it does not displease me ; it delights me, on the contrary. So you too had thought of the League. So much the better, *mordieu !* so much the better. So you too had had a little end of the idea ? What am I saying,—a little end ? The big end. After what you have told me, in my word, I find it marvellous. In fact, I am surrounded only by superior intelligences, and I myself am the great ass of my kingdom."

" Oh, your Majesty jests."

" I ! God forbid it ! The situation is too serious. I say what I think, François. You will solve a great difficulty for me,—all the greater that for some time past I have been ill, my faculties are failing ; Miron often explains that to me. But let us return to the matter ; besides, what need have I of my intelligence while I can see my way by the light of yours ? It is, then, agreed ? I shall appoint you chief of the League ? "

François thrilled with joy.

"Oh," he said, "if your Majesty thinks me worthy of this trust."

"Trust? Ah, François, from the moment that it is not M. de Guise who is the chief, whom should I mistrust? The League itself? Does the League, perchance offer any danger? Speak, my good François; tell me all."

"Oh, sire," said the duke.

"How senseless I am!" resumed Henri. "In that case, my brother would not be the chief; or, better still, from the moment my brother is the chief, there can be no danger. Now, this is logic, and our pedagogue has not stolen our money; no, I have no distrust. Besides I know enough good soldiers in France to be sure of drawing my sword against the League in good company the day when the League will be in my way."

"That is true, sire," replied the duke, whose simplicity was almost as well assumed as that of his brother. "The king is always the king."

Chicot opened an eye.

"Pardieu!" said Henri, "but, unfortunately, I too have an idea; it is incredible how many I have to-day. There are certain days like that."

"What idea, brother?" asked François, already uneasy because he could not believe in so much happiness being accomplished without some obstacle arising.

"Why, our cousin Guise, the father, or would-be father, of the invention, has probably made up his mind to be the head."

"The head, sire?"

"Without any doubt; he has probably fostered the plan only to turn it to his own advantage. True, you say you fostered it with him. Take care, François, he is not the man to be the victim of the '*sic vos non vobis*'—you know Virgil—'*nidificatis aves*.'"

"Oh, sire."

"François, I would wager he thought of that. He knows me to be so careless."

"Yes, but so soon as you shall have certified your wishes he will yield."

"Or pretend to yield; I have already told you, François, my cousin Guise has a long arm. I shall even say more: he has very long arms, and no one in the kingdom, not even the king, can touch Spain with one hand, and with the other, England,—Don John of Austria and Elizabeth. Bourbon's sword was less long than Guise's arm, yet he greatly injured my grandfather, Francis I."

"But," said François, "if you consider him so dangerous, all the more reason to give me the command of the League; hold him between my power and yours, and have him tried for his first treasonable act."

Chicot opened the other eye.

"His trial, François, his trial! It was good for Louis XI., who was powerful and rich, to make trials and erect scaffolds; but I have not even enough money to buy all the black velvet I might need for the occasion."

In saying these words, Henri, in spite of his power of self-control, could not keep his eyes from flashing. Chicot now closed both of his. There was a short pause which the king was the first to break.

"We must keep on good terms with all parties, my dear François," he said; "no civil wars, no quarrels among my subjects. I am the son of Henri the fighter and Catherine the wily; I have a little of my good mother's astuteness. I shall recall the Duc de Guise, and make him so many fine promises that we shall settle the matter most amicably."

"Sire," cried the Duc d'Anjou, "you will surely grant me the command?"

"I should think so."

"You are anxious that I should have it?"

"Most anxious."

"You really wish it?"

"It is my greatest desire; but it must not displease my cousin Guise too much."

"Well, have no fear," said the Duc d'Anjou; "if that

be the only obstacle to my nomination, I shall arrange the matter with the duke."

" When ? "

" At once."

" You are going to see him, to pay him a visit ? Oh, think of it, brother ! the honor is a very great one."

" No, sire, I am not going to him."

" How so ? "

" He is waiting for me."

" Where ? "

" In my room."

" In your room ? I heard the cries of the people as he left the Louvre."

" Yes, but after going through the great door, he returned through the postern. The king had the right to the first visit, but I to his second."

" Ah, brother," said Henri, " I thank you for thus keeping up my prerogatives, which I have the weakness so often to abandon. Go then, François, and may you succeed."

The duke bent over his brother's hand to kiss it.

" What are you doing, François ? In my arms, on my heart, that is your true place," cried Henri.

The two brothers warmly embraced each other several times, and the Duc d'Anjou, being finally restored to freedom, left the cabinet, and ran through the gallerie leading to his apartment. His heart, like that of the first navigator, must have been clothed in oak and steel, nor to burst with joy.

The king, seeing his brother go, gave an angry growl and rapidly making his way through the secret corrido leading to Queen Marguerite of Navarre's room, now occupied by the Duc d'Anjou, he reached a sort of drum' where he could easily hear the conversation about to take place between the dukes of Anjou and Guise.

" *Ventre de biche !*" cried Chicot, opening both his eyes, and sitting up. " How very touching these family scenes are ! For one moment I believed myself in Olympus, witnessing the meeting of Castor and Pollux after their six months' separation."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

IN WHICH IT IS PROVED THAT LISTENING IS THE
BEST WAY TO HEAR.

THE Duc d'Anjou had joined his guest, the Duc de Guise, in that room where the Béarnais and De Mouy had made their plans of escape. The prudent Henri was well aware that few rooms in the Louvre were not so built that every word, no matter how low it was spoken, could not reach the ear of the person interested in hearing it ; nor was the Duc d'Anjou ignorant of this detail, but completely beguiled by his brother's manner, he forgot it, or took no notice of it.

Henri III. entered his place of audience, just as his brother entered the room, so that not one word spoken by the two interlocutors escaped his hearing.

" Well, monseigneur," quickly asked the Duc de Guise.

" Well, duke, the interview is over."

" You are very pale, monseigneur."

" Visibly so ?"

" For me, yes."

" The king saw nothing ?"

" I think not ; but his Majesty kept you ?"

" As you saw."

" No doubt to speak of the proposition I had just made ?"

" Yes, monsieur."

Then followed a moment of embarrassing silence, the meaning of which was very clear to Henri, in his hiding-place.

" And what says his Majesty, monseigneur ?" asked Guise.

" He approves of the idea, but the greater it appears, the more he hesitates to place a man like you at the head."

" Then we are about to fail ?"

" I fear so, my dear duke. The League seems to be suppressed."

"The devil!" said the duke, "that would be death before birth,—the end before the beginning."

"The one is as witty as the other," said a low, ringing voice at Henri's side, as he leaned forward in his auditory. The king turned quickly and saw Chicot's long body listening at one hole while he listened at the other.

"You followed me, knave!" he said.

"Hush, my son!" said Chicot, waving his hand; "you prevent me from hearing."

The king shrugged his shoulders; but as Chicot was, after all, the only human being in whom he had entire confidence, he resumed his listening.

"Monseigneur," said the Duc de Guise, "it seems to me that in that case the king would have refused at once; his greeting was such that he would have dared show me his thoughts. Does he wish to oust me, perchance?"

"I believe so," said the prince, with hesitation.

"He would then ruin the undertaking."

"Assuredly," replied the Duc d'Anjou, "and as you had opened the fire, I aided you with all my power."

"How so, monseigneur?"

"In this: the king has left me almost master to kill or reanimate the League."

"In what way?" cried the Lorraine duke, whose eyes flashed almost in spite of himself.

"Listen; this is subject to the approval of the leaders. If, instead of expelling you or dissolving the League, he appointed a chief favorable to the enterprise; if, instead of appointing the Duc de Guise, he appointed the Duc d'Anjou?"

"Ah!" exclaimed the Duc de Guise, while the blood mounted to his face.

"Good!" said Chicot, "the two dogs are going to fight over their bones;" but to his great surprise and the king's, who, on this score, knew much less than Chicot, the Duc de Guise suddenly ceased to show surprise or irritation and continued in a calm and almost joyful tone,—

" You are a clever politician, monseigneur, if you have done that."

" I have," said François.

" Very quickly."

" Yes, but I was aided by circumstances, and took advantage of the fact ; however, my dear duke," added the prince, " nothing is decided, and I would conclude nothing before seeing you."

" Why, monseigneur ? "

" Because I do not yet know where it will all end."

" I know," said Chicot.

" It is a little plot," said Henri, smiling.

" Of which M. de Morvilliers, who is usually so well informed, did not even speak to you ; but let us listen, it is becoming interesting."

" Well, I can tell you, monseigneur, not where it will end,—God alone knows that,—but how it can serve us," replied the Duc de Guise. " The League is a second army ; now, as I hold the first, as my brother the cardinal holds the Church, nothing can resist us while we are so united."

" Without counting," said the Duc d'Anjou, " that I am heir presumptive to the throne."

" Ah, ah ! " said Henri.

" He is right," said Chicot ; " it is your fault. Why do you always separate the two chemises of Notre-Dame le Chartres ? "

" But, monseigneur, heir presumptive though you be, calculate your evil chances."

" Do you not think I have already done so, and weighed them a thousand times ? "

" There is first the King of Navarre."

" Oh, that one does not worry me ; he thinks of nothing but his love for La Fosseuse."

" He, monseigneur,—he will dispute even to your very purse-strings ; he is threadbare, thin, and famished ; he reminds me of one of those stray cats who spend a whole night in a gutter for the mere scent of a mouse, while the sleek, fat, well-fed cat can scarcely draw his claws from

their velvet covers. The King of Navarre is watching you, and does not lose sight of you or your brother. He hungers for your throne. If any accident should happen to the one who now occupies it, you will see if the thin cat has elastic muscles, and if he will not bound from Pau to Paris at one jump to make you feel his claws. You will see, monseigneur, you will see ! ”

“ An accident to him who occupies the throne ? ” slowly repeated François, fixing his questioning gaze on the Duc de Guise.

“ Eh,” said Chicot, “ this Guise is saying, or about to say, very instructive things, and I advise you to profit by them.”

“ Yes, monseigneur,” repeated the Duc de Guise, “ an accident. Accidents are not rare in your family. You know it as well, if not better, than I. Such a prince who is in good health, suddenly begins to weaken another is counting on long years of life, and has perhaps but a few hours to live.”

“ Do you hear, Henri, do you hear ? ” said Chicot taking the king’s hand, which was covered with a cold perspiration.

“ Yes, it is true,” said the Duc d’Anjou, in a voice so low that the king and Chicot were compelled to double their attention to hear him, “ the princes of my house are born under fatal influences ; but my brother, Henri III., is, thank God ! strong and healthy. He formerly endured the hardships of war, and now that his life is but a succession of recreations, all the more reason for him to endure them.”

“ Yes, but remember, monseigneur,” replied the duke, “ the amusements of the kings of France are not always unattended with danger. How did your father, Henri II., die ? He too had endured the hardships of war without danger. Montgomery’s lance was a harmless weapon against a cuirass, but not against an eye ; so King Henri II. died, and that was an accident. You will tell me that fifteen years after this accident the queen mother had M. de Montgomery taken and beheaded.

when he imagined he enjoyed the benefits of prescription. This is true, but the king was none the less dead. As for your brother, the late King Francis, see how his feebleness of mind injured him in the eyes of the people ; he too lied most unfortunately, the worthy prince. You will say, monseigneur, that it was an earache ; and who the devil would take that for an accident ? Yet it was one, and of the most serious kind. And I have heard more than once in the camp, in the city, and even at court, that this mortal malady had been poured into the ear of King Francis II. by some one whom it would be a great mistake to call chance, because this person bore another very well known name."

" Duke ! " murmured François, reddening.

" Yes, monseigneur, yes," continued the duke ; " for some time past the title of king has brought misfortune with it. Look at Antoine de Bourbon ; it surely was that title of king that made him die from an arquebuse wound in the shoulder, which to any one but a king would have been by no means fatal. The eye, the ear, and the shoulder have caused much mourning in France, and that reminds me that your M. de Bussy made some good poetry on this subject."

" What poetry ? " asked Henri.

" Come, come ! " said Chicot, " do you not know it ? "

" No."

" Then you must be a real king if such things are kept from you. I shall tell it to you ; listen :—

' Par l'oreille, l'épaule et l'œil,
La France eut trois rois au cercueil
Par l'oreille, l'œil et l'épaule,
Il mourut trois rois dans la Gaule.'

But hush ! I have an idea that your brother is about to say things even more interesting."

" But the last line ? "

" I shall repeat it later."

" What do you mean ? "

" I mean that two persons are wanting in the family picture ; but listen, M. de Guise is about to speak, and he will not forget them."

In fact, the dialogue was resumed at this moment.

" Without counting, monseigneur," said the Duc de Guise, " that the history of your relatives and allies is not complete in Bussy's verse."

" What was I telling you ? " asked Chicot, nudging Henri.

" You forget Jeanne d'Albret, the mother of the Béarnais, who died from smelling a pair of perfumed gloves she had bought from the Florentine of the Pont-Saint Michel,—a very unexpected death, which occasioned a greater surprise that there were people who had great interest in this death. Will you deny, monseigneur, that this death was a great surprise to you ? "

The duke made no reply, but raised his eyebrows in a manner that gave an even more forbidding expression to his eyes.

" Then King Charles IX.'s accident, which your Highness forgets," said the duke ; " yet this is one which should be remembered. His accident came neither through the eyes, ear, shoulder, nor nose ; it came through the mouth."

" What ! " cried François, and Henri III. heard the sound of his brother's footstep as he stepped back in terror.

" Yes, monseigneur, through the mouth," repeated Guise. " These hunting-books are dangerous when their leaves stick together and can only be looked over by constantly wetting the finger. These old books corrupt the saliva, and a man does not go far when his saliva is corrupt."

" Duke ! duke ! " repeated the prince, " I believe you take pleasure in inventing crimes."

" Crimes," asked Guise, " and who speaks of crimes I am simply speaking of accidents. They were never considered anything but accidents. Was it not also an accident that befell King Charles IX. out hunting ? "

" Well," said Chicot, " here is something new for you who like to hunt ; listen, Henri, this must be curious."

" I know what it is," said Henri.

" Yes, but I do not know. I had not yet been presented at court ; let me listen, my son."

" You know, monseigneur, to what chase I am alluding," continued the Lorraine prince. " I speak of the one where, with the generous intention of killing the boar that turned on your brother, you fired so hastily that, instead of wounding the animal at which you aimed, you hit the one at which you did not aim. This shot, monseigneur, tends to prove, better than anything else, how we should beware of accidents. Your skill is well known at court. Never before had you missed your aim, and you must have been greatly surprised to do so then, particularly when the report spread that the king might have been killed in the fall, had not Henri of Navarre luckily slain the boar you had missed."

" But," said the Duc d'Anjou, trying to recover his assurance which the Duc de Guise's irony had so cruelly attacked. " What interest could I have in the death of the king when the successor of Charles IX. was to be Henri III.?"

" One moment, monseigneur, let us understand each other. There was already one vacant throne,—that of Poland. The death of Charles IX. would have left another,—that of France. No doubt I am aware that our elder brother would unquestionably have chosen the throne of France ; but even the Kingdom of Poland was not to be despised. I have been told that many people have coveted the poor little thronelet of Navarre. Besides, this brought you one degree nearer, and the accidents were to your profit. King Henri III. returned from Warsaw in ten days ; in case of an accident, why could you not do the same ? "

Henri III. looked at Chicot, who in turn looked at the king, no longer with that expression of malicious sarcasm which was the jester's habitual one, but with an almost

tender interest which was not of long duration on his weather-beaten face.

“ What have you concluded, duke ? ” then asked the Duc d’Anjou, putting, or trying to put, an end to this conversation in which the Duc de Guise’s dissatisfaction showed itself so plainly.

“ Monseigneur, I conclude that every king has his accident, as we said just now, and that you are the inevitable accident of King Henri III., particularly if you are chief of the League, because to be chief of the League is to be almost king of the king ; without counting that, by being chief of the League, you suppress the accident of your own approaching reign—that is, the Béarnais.”

“ Approaching reign ! Do you hear ? ” cried Henri III.

“ *Ventre de biche !* I should think I did hear,” said Chicot.

“ So—” said the Duc de Guise.

“ So I shall accept,” repeated the Duc d’Anjou. “ Is your opinion, is it not ? ”

“ Of course ! ” said the Lorraine prince ; “ and I beseech you to accept, monseigneur.”

“ And you, to-night ? ”

“ Oh, be easy ; my men have been at work since morning, and to-night Paris will be a curious sight.”

“ What is going on in Paris to-night ? ” asked Henri.

“ Can’t you guess ? ”

“ No.”

“ Oh, what a fool you are, my son ; to-night they sign the League publicly, though for a long time they have been signing it in secret while awaiting your assent. You gave it this morning, and this evening, *ventre de biche !* they sign. You see, Henri, your accidents—if you have two of them—lose no time.”

“ It is well,” said the Duc d’Anjou ; “ till to-night, duke.”

“ Yes, till to-night,” said Henri.

“ What,” said Chicot, “ you will not expose yourse

y running through the streets of your capital to-night, Henri ? ”

“ Of course I shall.”

“ You are wrong.”

“ Why so ? ”

“ Beware of accidents.”

“ I shall be well accompanied, be assured ; besides, come with me”

“ Come now, you take me for a Huguenot, my son, and you are wrong. I am a good Catholic, and I wish to sign the League. I will do it ten times rather than once, and a hundred times rather than ten.”

The voices of the two dukes now died away.

“ Yet one word,” said the king, stopping Chicot as he moved away ; “ what do you think of all this ? ”

“ I think that every one of the kings, your predecessors, was ignorant of his accident. Henri II. had not foreseen the eye ; François II. had not foreseen the ear ; Antoine de Bourbon had not foreseen the shoulder ; Jeanne d’Albret had not foreseen the nose ; Charles IX. had not foreseen the mouth. You, Master Henri, have a great advantage over them ; for, *ventre de biche !* you know your brother, I believe.”

“ Yes,” replied Henri, “ and *par la mordieu !* he will find it out before long.”

CHAPTER XL.

THE EVENING OF THE LEAGUE.

PARIS, such as we know it now, has only a crowd more or less great, a noise more or less loud, on its fête days ; but is always the same noise and the same crowd. The Paris of olden times had more than that. It was a beautiful sight to look down through the narrow streets, at the top of those houses, with balconies, beams, and gables, each one of which had its own character ; to see the thousands of people pressing towards the same point, yet

looking at each other, admiring each other, hooting at each other on account of the strange appearance of this one or that one. This was because, formerly, the clothes, arms, language, gesture, voice, carriage, each formed a curious detail ; and these thousand details assembled on a single point formed a total of the most interesting nature.

Now, such was Paris, at eight o'clock in the evening on the day when M. de Guise, after his visit to the king and his conversation with M. le Duc d'Anjou, expected to receive the signatures of the *bourgeois* of the good capital of the kingdom.

A crowd of citizens, arrayed in their best clothes as for a fête, or armed with their finest weapons as for a review or a fight, directed their steps towards the churches. The expression of all these men, animated with the same feeling and having the same object in view, was at once joyous and threatening, particularly when they passed before a post of Swiss or light-horse. This aspect, and notably the cries, jeers, and bravadoes which accompanied them, would have occasioned great uneasiness to M. de Monvilliers if this magistrate had not known his Parisians to be a mocking and scoffing people, but incapable of doing injuries unless a wicked friend should lead them on, or an imprudent enemy provoke them.

What added to the noise and confusion, and more especially to the varied aspect of this crowd, was that large numbers of women, scorning to stay at home on so great a day, had, willingly or no, followed their husbands. Many had done better still and brought with them a batch of children ; and it was a curious sight to see these brats hanging on to the monstrous muskets, gigantic sabres, and formidable pikes of their fathers. In fact, in all times, ages, and centuries, the Parisian gamin has always liked to drag some weapon which he could not carry, or admired it, when he could not drag it himself.

From time to time, some group, more animated than the rest, would bring to light the old swords by drawing them from their scabbards ; this hostile demonstration always took place before the house of some well-known Huguenot.

The children would then cry out, " Saint Bartholomew !—mew ! mew ! " while the fathers cried, " To the stake with the heretics ! to the stake ! "

The cries generally brought to the window the pale face of some old servant, and the sound of bolts being drawn was next heard. Then the *bourgeois*, happy and proud of having frightened another less brave than himself, continued his way and carried elsewhere his noisy and noffensive menace. It was in the Rue de l'Abre Sec that the crowd was the thickest. The street was literally choked, and the tumultuous throng pressed towards a brilliant light hung beneath a sign which a large number of our readers will doubtless recognize when we tell them that it bore on azure field, a chicken, with the legend, *A la Belle Étoile*.

On the threshold, a man, in a square cotton cap, according to the fashion of the day, covering a perfectly bald head, was talking and arguing. In one hand this personage brandished a naked sword, and in the other, a register, the leaves of which were half covered with signatures.

" Come ! come, good Catholics," he cried, " enter the hostelry of the Belle Étoile, where you will find good wine and good cheer. To-night, the good will be separated from the bad ; to-morrow morning the wheat will be known from the tares. Come, gentlemen ; you who can write, come and sign ; you who cannot write, come and tell your names to me, Maître la Hurière, or to my assistant, M. Croquentin."

In fact, M. Croquentin, a young scamp from Périgord, clad in spotless white, and wearing around his waist a cord, from which hung a knife and an inkstand, was writing down the names of all his neighbours, beginning with that of his respectable patron, Maître la Hurière.

" Gentlemen, it is for the Mass ! " cried the innkeeper at the top of his voice ; " gentlemen, it is for the holy religion ! "

He was choked with emotion and weariness, because his enthusiasm had been lasting since four o'clock in the afternoon. The result was that a great many people,

animated with the same zeal, signed on Maître la Hurière's register if they knew how to sign, and gave their names to Croquentin if they did not.

This was all the more flattering for La Hurière, as the vicinity of Saint-Germain-l'Auxerrois made terrible opposition to him ; but fortunately at that time the faithful were numerous, and the two establishments, instead of injuring, helped each other. Those who had been unable to penetrate into the church to sign on the main altar where lay the register, tried to make their way to La Hurière's double stand ; and those who had failed there hoped to be more fortunate at Saint-Germain-l'Auxerrois.

When La Hurière's and Croquentin's registers were both filled, the host of the Belle Étoile sent at once for two others, that there might be no interruption in the signatures. Proud of this first result, which was to place him so high in the opinion of M. de Guise, the innkeeper continued his invitations.

While the signers on the new registers gave themselves up to an ever-increasing zeal, a tall man elbowed his way through the crowd, and by means of blows distributed right and left succeeded in reaching M. Croquentin's register.

There he took the pen from the hands of an honest *bourgeois*, who had just completed his signature, and in letter half an inch long wrote his name on a blank page which seemed covered from that instant. Putting after it a dash composed of ornaments and blots, he handed the pen to the man behind him.

"Chicot," read the next signer. "Peste ! here is a gentleman who writes superbly."

It was Chicot who, after having refused to accompany the king, was running about the town for his own amusement. After having placed his name on M. Croquentin's register, he passed to Maître la Hurière's. The latter had seen his dashing signature and coveted this fine autograph for his book. Chicot was therefore received, not with open arms, but with open register ; and taking the pen from a wool merchant of the Rue de Béthisy, he wrote h

ame a second time, with a flourish a hundred times more magnificent than the first. Then he asked La Hurière if he had not a third register. La Hurière did not brook匣ery ; he was a bad host outside of his inn. He looked askance at Chicot, who looked him full in the face. La Hurière murmured the word " Huguenot," and Chicot that of " bad cook." La Hurière dropped his register to put his hand to his sword ; Chicot laid down the pen to be at liberty to draw his own ; and the scene was in all probability about to end in blows, of which the innkeeper of the *Grande Étoile* would have had more than his share, when Chicot felt his arm pinched, and turned around. The one who had pinched was the king, disguised as a *bourgeois*, and having with him Quélus and Maugiron, also disguised, and in addition to their rapiers, carrying each an *quebuse*.

" Well, well," said the king, " what is the matter ? Good Catholics quarrelling together ! *Par la mordieu !* that is a bad example ! "

" Monsieur," said Chicot, pretending not to recognize Henri, " do not attack the wrong one. Here is a rascal howling after the passers-by to make them sign on his register, and when they have signed, he howls louder than ever."

La Hurière's attention was drawn to new amateurs, and an influx of the crowd separated Chicot, the king, and the favorites from the establishment of the fanatical innkeeper.

" What enthusiasm ! " said Henri ; " and how religion must thrive to-night in my good city of Paris ! "

" Yes, sire ; but the atmosphere is bad for heretics, and our Majesty is considered one. Look to your left there, what do you see ? "

" Ah, ah ! M. de Mayenne's broad face and the cardinal's sharp nose ! "

" Hush, sire ! we play a sure game when we know where our enemies are while they do not know where we are."

" Do you think I have anything to fear ? "

" Eh, *mon Dieu !* in a crowd like this one can never

know. One has an open knife in one's hand. This knife penetrates into a neighbor's body no one knows how. The neighbor utters an oath and gives up the ghost. Let us turn away, sire."

"Have I been seen?"

"I think not, but you will if you stay here any longer."

"*Vive la messe! vive la messe!*" cried a mob of people coming from the *halles* and surging up the Rue de l'Arbre Sec like the rising tide.

"Hurrah for M. de Guise! hurrah for the cardinal! hurrah for M. de Mayenne!" replied the crowd standing at La Hurière's door, having just recognized the Lorraine princes.

"Oh, oh, what are those cries?" asked Henri III frowning.

"They are cries which show that each one has his own place and should remain in it,—M. de Guise in the street and you in the Louvre. Go to the Louvre, sire; go to the Louvre!"

"Are you coming with us?"

"I? Oh, no! you do not need me, my son; you have your usual body-guards. Forward, Quélus! forward Maugiron! I intend to see the spectacle to the end; find it curious if not amusing."

"Where are you going?"

"To write my name on the other registers. I want a thousand of my autographs to be found to-morrow in the streets of Paris. Here we are, on the quay. Good-night, my son; go to the right, while I go to the left. I am running to Saint-Méry to hear a famous preacher."

"Oh, oh, what is all this noise?" suddenly asked the king. "Why is every one running thus to the Pont Neuf?"

Chicot stood on tiptoe, but could see nothing save a mass of people crying, howling, and pushing, apparently carrying some one or something in triumph.

All at once, the waves of populace opened just at the place where the quay, widening out opposite the Rue des Lavandières, allowed the crowd to spread right and left.

nd like the monster borne by the waves to the feet of
Ippolytus, a man, who seemed to be the principal actor
in this burlesque scene, was driven by these human waves
to the very feet of the king.

This man was a monk mounted on an ass. The monk
spoke and gesticulated ; the ass brayed.

“Ventre de biche !” said Chicot, so soon as he had dis-
tinguished the man and the animal who had just
appeared, the one carrying the other. “ I was speaking
of the famous preacher of Saint-Méry, but it is not
necessary to go so far. Listen to this one.”

“ A preacher on an ass ? ” asked Quélus.

“ Why not, my son ? ”

“ Why, it is Silenus,” said Maugiron.

“ Which is the preacher ? ” asked Henri ; “ they both
speak at once.”

“ The one underneath is the most eloquent,” said
Chicot, “ but the one at the top speaks the best French.
Listen, Henri.”

“ Silence ! ” came from all sides.

“ Silence ! ” cried Chicot, in a voice that rang out
above all others.

All were silent. The spectators gathered around
the monk and the donkey. The monk began his
speech :—

“ Brethren,” he said, “ Paris is a superb city ; Paris is
the pride of the children of France, and the Parisians are a
atty people, so says the song.”

And the monk began singing at the top of his voice :

“ Parisian, my friend,
How learned you be ! ”

But at these words the ass joined in with an accom-
paniment so loud and so spirited that the rider had to
ease. The people burst out laughing.

“ Hush, Panurge, hush ! ” cried the monk ; “ you
may speak in turn, but let me speak first.”

The ass was quiet.

“ Brethren,” continued the preacher, “ the earth is

often but a valley of grief where man can quench his thirst only with his tears."

" But he is dead drunk," said the king.

" Of course ! " said Chicot.

" I who speak to you," continued the monk, " such as you see me, I am returning from exile, like the Hebrews and for a week Panurge and I have been living on alms and privations."

" Who is Panurge ? " asked the king.

" The superior of his convent, in all probability," said Chicot ; " but let me listen. The good man touches me."

" Who brought me to this, friends ? It was Herod,—you know of which Herod I am speaking."

" And you too, my son," said Chicot. " I have explained the anagram to you."

" Rascal ! "

" To whom are you speaking,—to me, the monk, or to the ass ? "

" To all three."

" Brethren," continued the monk, " here is my answer that I love as I would a lamb ; he will tell you that we have come from Villeneuve-le-Roi in three days to be present at this great solemnity. Now, we came,—

" With our purse so flat
And our throats so dry."

But Panurge and I were put to no expense."

" But who the devil is Panurge ? " asked Henri, worried by that strange name.

" We have come," continued the monk, " to see what is taking place ; we only see, but we do not understand. What is taking place, brethren ? Is it to-day that King Herod is deposed ? Is it to-day that they put Brother Henri in a convent ? "

" Oh, oh," said Quélus, " I have a great mind to bore a hole into that wine-keg ! "

" Pshaw ! " said Chicot, " do you get angry for a little, Quélus ? Does not the king go into a convent every day ? Believe me, Henri, if nothing worse is done,

you, you will have no reason to complain,—eh, Panurge?"

The donkey, hearing its name, pricked up its ears and began to bray in a most terrible fashion.

"Oh, Panurge," said the monk, "have you any missions? Gentlemen," he continued, "I left Paris with two travelling companions,—Panurge, who is my ass, and M. Chicot, who is his Majesty's jester. Can you tell me what has become of my friend Chicot?"

Chicot made a grimace.

"Ah," said the king, "he is your friend?"

Quélus and Maugiron burst out laughing.

"He is handsome and most respectable," said the king. "What is the name of this friend of yours?"

"It is Gorenflot, Henri; you know that dear Gorenflot, about whom M. de Morvilliers has already spoken a few words?"

"The agitator of Sainte-Genevieve."

"In person."

"In that case I shall have him hanged."

"Impossible!"

"Why so?"

Because he has no neck."

"Brethren," continued Gorenflot, "brethren, you see a true martyr. It is my cause that they defend at this moment, or rather that of all good Catholics. You do not know what is going on in the provinces and what the Huguenots are doing. In Lyons we were obliged to kill those who preached revolt. While one of them remains in France, true Catholics cannot have one moment's peace. Let us exterminate the Huguenots. To arms, brethren, to arms!"

Several voices repeated: "To arms!"

"*Par la mordieu!*" said the king, "make this fellow hold his tongue, or we shall have a second Saint-Bartholomew."

"Wait, wait," said Chicot, and taking a cane from the hands of Quélus he passed behind the monk and struck him on the shoulder with all his force.

"Murder!" cried the monk.

"What! is it you?" said Chicot, passing his hand under the monk's arm. "How are you?"

"Help me, Monsieur Chicot, help me!" cried Gorenflot. "The enemies of the faith wish to assassinate me, but I will not die without making my voice heard. Death to the Huguenots! Death to the Béarnais!"

"Will you hold your tongue, you animal!"

"To the devil with the Gascons!" continued the monk.

At this moment, a second blow fell upon the shoulder of the monk with such force that he cried out with real pain. Chicot, astonished, looked about him, and saw nothing but the stick. The blow had been given by a man who disappeared in the crowd after administering the fleeting punishment.

"Oh, oh," said Chicot, "who in the devil is avenging us so? Can it be some fellow-countryman? I must find out," and he began to run after the man who was gliding away along the quay, escorted by a single companion.

CHAPTER XLI.

THE RUE DE LA FERRONNERIE.

CHICOT had good legs, and would have made good use of them to join the man who had just beaten Gorenflot. Something peculiar in the aspect of this man, and particularly in that of his companion, had not made him understand that there might be danger in seeking acquaintance which they seemed so anxious to avoid. In fact, the two fugitives were visibly eager to lose themselves in the crowd, and turned only at the street corners to see that they were not followed.

Chicot thought that the best way not to seem to follow them was to precede them. Both were going to the Rue Saint-Honoré, through the Rue de la Mounan and Rue Tirechappe; at the last corner he passed them, a

inning on ahead, hid himself at the end of the Rue des Ourdonnais. The two men went up the Rue Saint-onoré, in the shadow of the houses, with their hats pushed over their eyes, and their cloaks drawn up over their faces, walking with a quick and martial tread towards the Rue de la Ferronnerie. Chicot continued to precede them. At the corner of the Rue de la Ferronnerie the two men stopped again to throw a rapid glance round them.

During that time, Chicot had continued in advance, and had reached the middle of the street.

In the middle of the street, before a house so old that it seemed crumbling to pieces, was a litter, to which were attached two strong horses. Chicot looked about, saw the driver asleep, and a woman, apparently uneasy, looking through the blind. It flashed through his mind that the litter might be waiting for the two men; he turned around it, and protected by its shadow combined with that of the house, he slipped under a stone bench which served as a stall to the vegetable sellers who, twice a week, held a market in the Rue de la Ferronnerie.

Scarcely was he hidden when he saw the two men appear at the horses' heads, where they stopped again, uneasy. One of them woke up the coachman whose sleep was very sound, and as he found some difficulty in rousing him, let fall a "*Cap de diou!*" strongly accented, while the other, still more impatient, pricked the driver with a dagger.

"Oh, oh," said Chicot, "I was not mistaken. They are compatriots, and I am no longer surprised that they wounded Gorenfot when he spoke contemptuously of the Gascons."

The young lady, recognizing the two men, leaned out of the window, and Chicot was enabled to see her plainly. She was about twenty or twenty-two, very beautiful and very pale. Had the light been strong, one might have been able to see by the dark rings under her eyes and the languid attitude of her whole body that she was suffering

from an illness the secret of which was made plain by the enlargement of her waist.

But of all this, Chicot could only see that she was young, pale, and fair.

The two men approached the litter, and found themselves between her and the bench beneath which Chicot wae concealed. The taller of the two, taking in both of his the little white hand extended to him through the window, rested both arms on the ledge.

"Well, my love, my little heart, my pet," he said, "how are you?"

The lady shook her head with a sad smile, and showed a bottle of smelling-salts.

"Still fainting-spells, *ventre saint-gris*! How provoke I would be to see you ill, dear love, if I were not the cause of your sweet malady."

"Why the devil did you bring Madame to Paris?" asked the other man, rather rudely. "On my word, it is a curse that you must always have some petticoat pinne to your doublet."

"Ah, my dear Agrippa," said the first speaker, who seemed to be the lover or husband of the lady, "it is a great a grief to part from those we love," and he gave her a loving glance.

"*Cordioux*! upon my soul, it drives me mad to hear you speak," replied the sour companion. "Did you come to Paris to make love. It seems to me that Béarn is large enough for your sentimental promenades without continuing them in Babylon, where you have come near being killed at least twenty times this evening. Come home, if you wish to make love, behind the curtains of the litter, but here, *mordioux*! confine yourself to your political intrigues, my master."

At this word *master*, Chicot would have liked to raise his head, but he could scarcely risk the movement without being seen.

"Let him scold, my love, and don't trouble yourself about what he says. I think he would be ill himself if he could not scold."

"But at least, *ventre saint-gris* ! as you say yourself, get into the litter and say your sweet things to Madame ; you will run less risk of being recognized than by standing in the street."

"You are right, Agrippa," said the amorous Gascon. And you see, my love, that his advice is not so bad as it seems. There, make room for me, my sweet one, and permit me to sit beside you, as I cannot be at your feet."

"Not only do I permit it, sire, but I wish it most earnestly," replied the young lady.

"Sire!" murmured Chicot who, carried away by impulse, raised his head and struck it against the stone bench. "Sire! What is she saying there?"

But in the meanwhile the happy lover took advantage of the permission, and the creaking of the litter announced an increase of its burden. This creaking was followed by the sound of a long and tender kiss.

"*Mordioux!*" cried the companion, who had remained outside, "man is in truth a very stupid animal."

"I'll be hanged if I can understand any of this," murmured Chicot, "but I shall wait ; my patience is sure to be rewarded."

"Oh, how happy I am," continued the one who was called sire, and who did not appear in the least concerned at the remonstrances of his friend, to which he was doubt accustomed. "*Ventre saint-gris!* this is a good day ; here are my good Parisians, who hate me with their whole soul and who would kill me if they could, doing their very best to smooth my way to the throne, and I live in my arms the woman I love. Where are we, D'Aubigné ? When I am king, I will erect on this very spot a statue to the genius of the Béarnais."

"Of the Béarn—" began Chicot, but he stopped, having given his head a second bump.

"We are in the Rue de la Ferronnerie, sire, and it does not smell nice," said D'Aubigné, who was still in a bad humor and found fault with things when men paid no attention to him.

"It seems to me," said Henri, for our readers have

doubtless recognized the King of Navarre,—“ it seems to me that I see before me the whole course of my life ; that I see myself king ; that I am on the throne, strong and powerful, but perhaps not so much loved as I am at this hour ; and that my gaze peers into the future, to the very hour of my death. Oh, my darling, tell me again that you love me, for my very heart melts at the sound of your voice.” And the Béarnais, yielding to the feeling of sadness which sometimes invaded him, sighed deeply and let his head fall on the shoulder of his mistress.

“ Oh, *mon Dieu !* ” cried the lady, frightened, “ are you fainting, sire ? ”

“ Good ! that alone was wanting,” said D’Aubigné “ fine soldier, fine general, fine king who faints away ! ”

“ No, sweet one, have no fear,” said Henri ; “ if I faint near you, it will be with happiness.”

“ In truth, sire, I know not why you sign Henri de Navarre ; you should sign Ronsard or Clément Marot *Cordioux* ! how is it you get on so badly with Madam Margot when you are both so inclined to poetry ? ”

“ Ah, D’Aubigné ! have pity ; do not speak of my wife. *Ventre saint-gris !* you know the proverb ; if we were to meet her ? ”

“ Though she is in Navarre ? ” asked D’Aubigné.

“ *Ventre saint-gris !* am I not too in Navarre ? Am I not at least supposed to be there ? Come, Agrippa, you have made me shiver ; get in and let us go home.”

“ Faith, no,” said D’Aubigné, “ I shall walk behind ; should annoy you, and, what is worse, you would annoy me.”

“ Then close the door and do as you please, surly bear,” said Henri ; then turning to the coachman, “ Lavarenn you know where ! ” he said.

The litter went slowly off, followed by D’Aubigné, who though he scolded the friend, had wished to watch over the king.

This departure delivered Chicot from a terrible apprehension ; because after the conversation he had ha-

ith Henri, D'Aubigné was not the kind of man to pare the life of the imprudent one who had chanced to hear it.

" Let me see," said Chicot, crawling out from underneath his bench, " must Valois know what has just taken place ? "

Chicot straightened out his long legs, which had become stiff in their cramped position.

" And why should he know it ? " resumed the Gascon, continuing his soliloquy. " Two men and a woman who hide themselves. That would be cowardly ; no, I will not tell. I am informed, and that is the important point ; or is it not I who reign ? " and Chicot capered about joyfully.

" Lovers are very nice," he pursued, " but D'Aubigné is a ght ; that dear Henri de Navarre loves too often for a king *in partibus*. A year ago he came back to Paris for Madame de Sauve ; now he is accompanied by that charming little creature who has fainting-spells. Who the devil can she be ? La Fosseuse, in all probability. And now that I think of it, if Henri de Navarre is a serious pretender, if he truly aspires to the throne, he must think a battle of destroying his enemies Le Balafré, the Cardinal de Lorraine, and that dear Duc de Mayenne. Well, I love the Béarnais, and I am sure that sooner or later he will lay some ugly trick on that horrible Lorraine butcher. I have decided not to say a single word of what I have seen and heard."

At this moment a band of drunken Leaguers passed, crying, " *Vive la messe !* Death to the Huguenots ! Death to the heretics ! " but the litter had turned the corner of the cemetery of the Holy Innocents and passed into the depths of the Rue Saint-Denis.

" Come, let us recapitulate," said Chicot. " I have seen the Cardinal de Guise, the Duc de Mayenne, the King Henri de Valois, the King of Navarre. One single prince wanting to complete my collection ; that is the Duc d'Anjou. Come, where is my François III. ? *Ventre de che !* I am dying to see that worthy monarch," and

Chicot turned in the direction of Saint-Germain l'Auxerrois.

Chicot was not the only person in search of the Duc d'Anjou, and uneasy at his absence ; the Guises too were looking for him on all sides, but they were not more fortunate than Chicot. M. d'Anjou was not the man to risk himself imprudently, and we shall see later what precautions had kept him from his friends.

Once, Chicot thought he had found him in the Rue de Béthisy ; a large group had gathered before the door of a wine-shop, and Chicot recognized M. de Monsoreau and Le Balafré among the number.

“Good !” he said. “Here are the sucking fish ; the shark cannot be far.”

Chicot was mistaken ; M. de Monsoreau and Le Balafré were busy pouring out numerous potations to an orator whose eloquence they thus encouraged. This orator was Gorenflot, in a state of complete intoxication relating his journey to Lyons, and his duel in an inn with a dreadful Huguenot. M. de Guise listened intently to this tale, in which he fancied there was some coincidence with the silence of Nicolas David. Besides, the Rue Béthisy was filled with people ; several gentlemen Leaguers had tied their horses to a sort of ring, frequently found in the cities at that period. Chicot stopped on the outside of the group and listened. Gorenflot, storming bursting, always tumbling from his living pulpit, and often replaced on Panurge, uttered only jerky sentences but as he could still speak, he was the object of an examination by MM. de Guise and Monsoreau, who drew from him fragments of confession and information.

Such a confession frightened the Gascon far more than the presence of the King of Navarre in Paris. He fore-saw the moment when Gorenflot would utter his name,—that name which would throw a fatal light on the mystery. He lost no time. In one moment he had cut the bridles of some of the horses fastened there, and distributing two or three violent blows, sent them through the crowd, which broke and dispersed before them.

Gorenflot feared for Panurge ; the gentlemen were afraid for their horses, their valises, and many for themselves. The crowd opened and scattered. The cry "Fire ! " was heard, repeated by a dozen voices. Chicot, not like an arrow through the different groups, approached Gorenflot with flaming eyes, which began the work of sobering him, caught Panurge by the bridle, and instead of following the crowd, turned his back on it. His double movement left between Gorenflot and the *duc de Guise* a considerable space, which was soon filled by a rush of new-comers.

Chicot then dragged the monk to a kind of *cul-de-sac* formed by the apse of Saint-Germain-l'Auxerrois, and placed him and Panurge against the wall, as a *basilic*.

" Ah, drunkard ! " he said to him, " ah, pagan ! ah, traitor ! ah, renegade ! will you always prefer a bottle of wine to your friend ? "

" Ah, Monsieur Chicot ! " stammered the monk.

" What ! I feed you, wretch ; I give you drink ; I fill your pockets and your stomach, and you betray me ? "

" Ah, Chicot, " said the monk, with tenderness.

" You tell my secrets, rascal ! "

" Dear friend. "

" Hush ! You are but a sycophant, and you deserve chastisement. "

The monk, short, vigorous, enormous, powerful as a bull, but overcome by repentance and wine, trembled in Chicot's hands who shook him like a balloon filled with air. Panurge alone protested against the violence to his friend by kicks, which Chicot answered with blows.

" Chastisement to me ! " murmured the monk, " a chastisement to your friend, dear Monsieur Chicot ! "

" Yes, yes, chastisement, " said Chicot ; " and you will receive it, " and the Gascon's stick passed from the donkey Gorenflot's broad, fleshy shoulders.

" Oh, if I were fasting ! " said Gorenflot, angrily.

" You would beat me, ungrateful one,—me, your friend ? "

" You my friend, Monsieur Chicot, and you treat me thus ! "

" He who loves well, chastises well."

" Take my life at once, while you are about it ! " cried Gorenflot.

" I ought to."

" Oh, if I were but fasting ! " said the monk, with a groan.

" You have already said so," and Chicot redoubled his proofs of affection towards the poor monk, who began to bellow loudly.

" Come, after the ox, here is the calf," said the Gascon.

" Now, hold on to Panurge, and go and sleep at the Cormier d'Abondance."

" I can no longer see my way," cried the monk, from whose eyes large tears were falling.

" Ah," said Chicot, " if you could weep the wine you have drunk, you would be sober. But no, I shall have to guide you." So Chicot took the ass by the bridle, while the monk, holding on with both hands, exerted himself to preserve his centre of gravity. They passed over the Pont aux Meuniers, the Rue Saint-Barthélemy, the Petit Pont, and went up the Rue Saint-Jacques, the monk still weeping, and Chicot still pulling.

Two of Bonhomet's assistants, in obedience to Chicot's orders, helped the monk to alight, and conducted him to the little room with which our readers are already acquainted.

" It is done," said the host, returning.

" Is he in bed ? " asked Chicot.

" Snoring."

" Very good ! But as he will wake up some day or other, remember that I do not wish him to know how he came here, or one word of explanation. Indeed, it will be better that he should not know that he has been out since the famous night when he made such a scandal in the convent, and that he should believe all the rest to be a dream."

" Very well, Monsieur Chicot ; but what has happened to the poor monk ? "

"A great misfortune. It seems that at Lyons he kicked a quarrel with an agent of M. de Mayenne, and killed him."

"Oh, *mon Dieu!*" cried the host.

"So M. de Mayenne has sworn, it seems, to have him broken on the wheel, alive or dead," replied Chicot.

"Have no uneasiness," said Bonhomet; "under no pretext will he leave here."

"Very good; and now," continued the Gascon, reassured about Gorenflot, "I must find the Duc d'Anjou." So he started off in search of his Majesty François III.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE PRINCE AND HIS FRIEND.

As we have seen, Chicot vainly sought the Duc d'Anjou through the streets of Paris on the evening of the League. We may remember that the duke had invited the prince to go out. This invitation had disturbed the suspicious prince. François had reflected; and after reflection, he surpassed the serpent in prudence. However, as his interests demanded that he should see with his own eyes what was taking place that evening, he decided to accept the invitation, but resolved, at the same time, not to leave his palace unless he were duly attended. As every man who fears, gets his favorite weapon, the duke went in search of his sword, which was Bussy d'Amboise.

To decide upon this step, the duke must have been very much frightened. Since his deception in regard to M. de Monsoreau, Bussy sulked; and François acknowledged to himself that if he were in Bussy's place, and had taken his courage as well as his place, he would have showed more than contempt for the prince who had betrayed him in so cruel a manner.

Bussy, like all sensitive natures, felt sorrow more vividly than pleasure. It is rare that a man, intrepid in anger, cold and calm in the face of fire and sword, does

not give way to grief more readily than a coward. Those from whom a woman can draw tears most quickly are the men most feared by other men.

Bussy was asleep in his sorrow, so to speak. He had seen Diane received at court, recognized as Comtesse de Monsoreau, admitted by Queen Louise among her ladies in-waiting ; he had seen a thousand curious glances directed to that unrivalled beauty which he had, so to speak, discovered and rescued from the grave where it was buried. During the whole evening he had fastened his ardent gaze on the young woman, who did not raise her heavy eyelids, in spite of all the brilliancy of this fête. Bussy, unjust like every man truly in love, forgetting the past, and destroying in his own mind all those phantom of happiness inspired by the past,—Bussy did not consider how great Diane's suffering must be to induce her to forego the happiness of gazing at the one sympathetic face amid the crowd of indifferent or simply curious ones.

"Oh," said Bussy to himself, as he waited in vain for a glance, "women have cleverness and audacity only to deceive a tutor, a husband, or a mother. They are awkward and cowardly when they have a simple debt of gratitude to pay. They fear so much to seem to love that they attach such exaggerated importance to their slight favor, that they do not mind breaking the heart of him who loves them, when such is their humor. Diane could tell me frankly, 'I thank you, M. de Bussy, for what you have done for me, but I do not love you.' The blow would kill or cure me. But no, she prefers to let me love her hopelessly ; but she has gained nothing by it. I no longer love her ; I despise her."

And he left the royal circle with rage in his heart. At this moment his was no longer the noble face on which all men gazed with terror and all women with love ; his brow was clouded, his eye crafty, and his smile deceitful. Bussy, as he glanced at his image in a large mirror, found it an unbearable sight.

"I am mad," he said. "What ! I shall torment myself about a person who scorns me, and make myself odious to

hundred who like me ? But why does she scorn me, or ather, for whom ? Is it for that long, livid skeleton who tands beside her and watches her incessantly, and who lso feigns not to see me ? And to think that if I wished t, in a quarter of an hour I could have him mute and told beneath my knee, with ten inches of my sword in is body ; to think that, if I only wished, I might stain hat white dress with the blood of him who has sewed hose flowers on it ; to think that, if I am not loved, I might at least be hated and feared ! Oh, her hatred, her atred, rather than her indifference ! Yes ; but to act hus would be mean and commonplace,—would be doing what a Quélus or a Maugiron would do if they knew how to love. Better resemble that hero of Plutarch whom I o greatly admired,—that young Antiochus, dying of love, and never confessing it, never uttering a complaint. Yes, I will be silent,—I who have fought with all the best hen of the time ; who have seen Crillon (the brave Crillon himself) disarmed before me, and held him at my dis retion. I will subdue my sorrow and stifle it in my soul, s Hercules did with the giant Anteus, without letting his foot touch his mother Hope. No, nothing is impossible to me who, like Crillon, have been called ‘ the brave.’ I shall do all that the heroes have done.”

With these words he relaxed the clinched hand with which he tore his breast, wiped the sweat from his brow, and walked slowly to the door. His fist was about to trike the tapestry ; but he summoned all his patience and gentleness and went out with smiling lips and a placid brow, but with a volcano in his heart.

It is true that on the way he encountered the Duc d’Anjou, and turned aside his head, because he felt that even all his fortitude could not make him smile, or even bow, to the prince who called him his friend and had so odiously betrayed him.

As he passed, the prince called Bussy’s name ; but Bussy did not even turn around. He went home, placed his sword on the table, drew his dagger from its sheath, unfastened his cloak and doublet himself, and sat down in

a large arm-chair, leaning his head against the scutcheon which ornamented its back. His attendants saw that he was absorbed ; they thought he wanted to rest, and withdrew. Bussy was not sleeping, he was dreaming. He spent several hours in this way, without noticing that at the other end of the room was a man who, also seated, was watching him attentively without speaking or making a gesture, probably waiting for a suitable occasion to enter into communication by word or sign. At length a cold shiver shook Bussy's shoulders and his eyes wandered. The observer did not stir.

The count's teeth soon began to chatter ; his arms stiffened ; his head, becoming too heavy, slipped along the back of the chair, and fell on his shoulder. At this moment the man who was observing him rose from his chair, and heaving a sigh, approached him.

" Monsieur le Comte," he said, " you have fever."

The count raised his face, flushed by the fever's heat.

" Ah, it is you, Rémy ! " he said.

" Yes, count ; I was waiting here for you."

" Here ! —and why ?"

" Because one does not remain long in the place where one suffers."

" Thank you, my friend," said Bussy, taking the young man's hand. Rémy held in his own that terrible hand which had become weaker than a child's, and pressed it to his heart with affection and respect.

" Now," he said, " the question, Monsieur le Comte, is to know whether you wish to remain in this condition. Do you wish the fever to increase until it overcomes you ? Then remain as you are. Do you wish to subdue it ? Then get into bed and have some one to read to you from a beautiful book from which you may draw example and strength."

The count had nothing to do but to obey ; so he did. All his friends who came to visit him found him in bed. During the whole of the next day Rémy never left his bedside. He exercised the double function of physician for the body and for the soul ; he had cooling drinks for

the one, and soft words for the other. But the next day, which was that of M. de Guise's visit to the Louvre, Bussy looked around him. Rémy was not there.

"He is tired," thought he; "it is very natural, poor ad, and he wants to enjoy the air, the sun, and the springtime. And then Gertrude no doubt expected him. Gertrude is but a servant, but she loves him. A servant who loves is better than a queen who does not love."

The day passed and Rémy did not return. Just because he was absent, Bussy wanted him, and felt terribly impatient.

"Oh," he murmured once or twice, "I still believed in riendship and gratitude, but henceforth I shall believe in nothing at all."

Towards evening when the streets were beginning to ill with people and noise, when the absence of light no onger permitted him to distinguish the objects in the oom, Bussy heard loud voices in the ante-chamber, and servant rushed in, saying,—

"It is Monseigneur the Duc d'Anjou."

"Let him enter," said Bussy, frowning at the thought hat his master was concerned about him,—this master whose very politeness he scorned.

The duke entered. Bussy's room was without lights : heavy hearts are fond of darkness, which they people with phantoms.

"It is too dark here," said the duke; "it must make you sad." Bussy remained silent; disgust closed his mouth.

"Are you seriously ill, that you do not answer me?" continued the duke.

"I am really very ill, monseigneur," murmured Bussy.

"Is that the reason why you have not appeared for wo days?" said the duke.

"Yes, monseigneur," replied Bussy.

The prince, piqued by these short answers, walked two or three times around the room to look at the sculptures, which stood out in the shadow.

"You seem to have fine lodgings, Bussy," said the duke. Bussy did not answer.

"Gentlemen," said François to his attendants, "remain in the next room. I believe my poor Bussy is really ill. Now, why have you not sent for Miron? The king's physician is not too good for Bussy."

Bussy's servant shook his head, and the duke observed the movement.

"Come, Bussy, are you in trouble?" he said, almost obsequiously.

"I do not know," replied the count.

The duke approached like those lovers who, the more they are rebuffed, the more gracious they become.

"Come, speak to me," he said.

"And what shall I say to you, monseigneur?"

"You are angry with me," he said in a low voice.

"I, angry? For what? Besides, it is of no use to be angry with princes; what good would that do?"

The duke was silent.

"But let us waste no time in preliminaries," said Bussy. "Come to the point, monseigneur."

The duke looked at Bussy.

"You need me, do you not?" said the latter, with incredible harshness.

"Ah, M. de Bussy!"

"Eh, you need me, I repeat. Do you suppose I think you come here through friendship? No, *pardieu!* for you love no one."

"Oh, Bussy, can you say such things to me?"

"Come, speak, monseigneur; what do you want? When one belongs to a prince, and when this prince disimulates to the point of calling one his friend,—well one must be grateful for the dissimulation and be ready to sacrifice everything,—even life. Speak."

The duke flushed; but as he was in the shadow, no one saw the flush.

"I wanted nothing," he said, "and you were mistaken in believing that my visit had an interested motive. desire only, seeing that it is a fine evening, and that all Paris is excited to-night over the signing of the League that you should accompany me a little about the streets."

Bussy looked at the duke.

" Have you not D'Aurilly ? " he asked.

" A lute-player ! "

" Ah, monseigneur, you are not giving him all his other qualities. I thought he fulfilled other functions near you, and besides D'Aurilly, you have with you ten or twelve gentlemen whose swords I hear striking against the wood-work of my ante-chamber."

The *portière* was raised gently.

" Who is this ? " asked the duke, haughtily, " and who enters unannounced in the room where I am ? "

" I, Rémy," replied Le Haudoin, without any embarrassment.

" Who is Rémy ? " asked the duke.

" Rémy is the physician, monseigneur," replied the young man.

" Rémy," said Bussy, " is more than the physician,—he is the friend."

" Ah ! " said the duke, feeling the blow.

" You have heard what Monseigneur desires ? " asked Bussy, preparing to leave his bed.

" That you accompany him ; but—"

" But what ? " asked the duke.

" But you will not accompany him, monseigneur," replied Le Haudoin.

" Why so ? " cried François.

" Because it is too cold, monseigneur."

" Too cold ? " said the duke, surprised that any one should dare resist him.

" Yes, too cold. Therefore, I who answer for M. de Bussy's health to his friends, and particularly to myself, I must forbid his going out."

Bussy was none the less ready to jump out of bed when Rémy's hand found his and pressed it significantly.

" Very good," said the duke ; " since the risk would be so great, he shall remain," and his Highness, very much quieted, walked towards the door. Bussy did not move.

The duke returned towards the bed.

" So you have decided,—you will not risk it ? "

“ You see, monseigneur, that the doctor forbids me.”

“ You should see Miron ; he is a great doctor.”

“ Monseigneur, I prefer a friendly doctor to a learned one,” said Bussy.

“ In that case, adieu.”

“ Adieu, monseigneur.”

The duke left with great noise. Hardly was he gone when Rémy, who had watched his departure, hastened to his patient.

“ Now, monseigneur,” he said, “ get up at once, if you please.”

“ Why shall I get up ? ”

“ To go out with me. It is too warm in this room.”

“ But you have just told the duke that it was too cold outside ! ”

“ Since his departure the temperature has changed.”

“ So that— ? ” said Bussy, rising with curiosity.

“ So that I am convinced that the air at this moment would do you good,” replied Le Haudoin.

“ I do not understand,” said Bussy.

“ Do you understand the drugs I give you ? Yet you swallow them. Come, get up ; a walk with M. d’Anjou was dangerous, but with the physician it will be beneficial I tell you so. Have you no more confidence in me. Then you must dismiss me.”

“ Well, then, since you wish it,” said Bussy.

“ You must.”

Bussy rose, pale and trembling.

“ An interesting pallor,” said Rémy ; “ the handsome invalid.”

“ But where are we going ? ”

“ In a neighborhood the air of which I analyzed to-day.”

“ And that air ? ”

“ Is excellent for your malady, monseigneur.”

Bussy dressed himself.

“ My hat and sword,” he said.

He put on the one, and fastened the other, and both went out together.

CHAPTER XLIII.

ETYMOLOGY OF THE RUE DE LA JUSSIENNE.

RÉMY took his patient by the arm, turned to the left, took the Rue Coquillière and followed it down to the rampart.

"It is strange!" said Bussy; "you are leading me near the marsh of the Grange-Batelière, and call it healthy."

"Oh, monsieur," said Rémy, "a little patience; we shall turn around the Rue Pagevin, leaving the Rue Breneuse on the right, and we shall enter the Rue Montmartre. You shall see what a beautiful street the Rue Montmartre is."

"Do you think I do not know it?"

"Well, so much the better if you know it; I shall not have to lose time by pointing out its beauties, and shall lead you at once to a pretty little street. Come, you will see."

In fact, after having passed the Porte Montmartre, and gone about two hundred yards in the street, Rémy suddenly turned to the right.

"Are you doing it on purpose?" cried Bussy. "We are going back to our starting-point!"

"This," said Rémy, "is the Rue de la Gypecienne, or de l'Egyptienne, if you prefer,—a street which the people are already beginning to call 'de la Gyssienne,' and which, before long, will be called 'de la Jussienne,' because that is softer, and as you go towards the south, the tendency of language is to multiply the vowels; you ought to know that, monseigneur, you who have been in Poland. Do not those rascals still use four consonants together, so that when they speak they seem to be cracking pebbles, and swear as they do so?"

"That is very true; but as I do not suppose you brought me here to discuss philology, come, tell me, where are we going?"

" Do you see that little church ? " asked Rémy, without replying directly to Bussy. " Eh, monseigneur, is it not well situated, with its façade on the street, and its apse on the garden of the community ? I would wager that you had never noticed it before."

" In fact, " said Bussy, " I did not know it."

And Bussy was not the only nobleman who had never entered that church of Sainte-Marie-l'Egyptienne, frequented almost exclusively by the people, and also known under the name of Chapelle Quoqhérion.

" Well, " said Rémy, " now that you know the name of that church, monseigneur, and that you have gazed long enough at the exterior, let us enter and see the stained glass windows of the nave ; they are most curious."

Bussy looked at Le Haudoïn and saw such a pleased smile on his face that he understood at once that the young doctor must have some other reason for wishing him to enter besides showing him windows which it was too dark to see. There were, however, other things to look at ; for the interior of the church was lighted up for service. There were some of those naïve paintings of the sixteenth century, such as Italy preserves, thanks to its fine climate ; whereas with us, dampness on the one hand and vandalism on the other, have effaced from our walls those traditions of another age, and those proofs of a faith that no longer exists. In fact, the artist had painted in fresco, and by order of the king, the life of Saint Mary the Egyptian. Now, among the most interesting scenes of this life, the artist, simple-minded and a great lover of truth,—historical, if not anatomical,—had placed, in the most conspicuous spot in the chapel, that critical moment when Saint Mary, having no money to pay the boatman, offers herself in payment for the passage.

It is only just to say that, in spite of the veneration of the faithful for Saint Mary the Egyptian converted, many good women of the neighborhood thought that the painter might have placed the scene in some other spot, or else treated it with less truth to nature ; and the reason they gave, or rather did not give, was that certain details in

he fresco attracted too often the eyes of the young shop-lerks, whom the drapers, their patrons, brought to church on Sundays and fête days.

Bussy looked at Rémy, who seemed to have become a shop clerk for the present, and was giving his whole attention to the picture.

" Do you pretend to awaken in my mind Anacreontic pleas, with your chapel of Sainte-Marie-l'Egyptienne ? " asked Bussy. " If so, you are mistaken ; you should bring here monks and students."

" God forbid ! " said Le Haudoin. " *Omnis cogitatio ibidinosa cerebrum inficit.*"

" Well, then ? "

" Well, one cannot become blind to enter here."

" Come, you had some other object in bringing me here, besides making me look at the knees of Saint Mary the Egyptian."

" Why, no ? "

" Then I have seen them. Let us go."

" Patience, the service is just ending. If we left now, we would disturb the faithful."

And Le Haudoin gently held Bussy by the arm.

" Ah, every one is going now," said Rémy. " Let us do the same, if you please."

Bussy walked towards the door, visibly indifferent and absent-minded.

" Well," said Le Haudoin, " here you are going out without taking holy water. What the devil are you thinking about ? "

Bussy, obedient as a child, directed his steps towards the column near which was the holy water font. Le Haudoin took advantage of this movement to make a sign to a woman, who immediately approached the same column. So at the moment when the count extended his hand towards the shell-shaped font, held up by two black marble Egyptians, a hand somewhat large and red, but still the hand of a woman, was extended towards his own, and dampened his fingers with the water. Bussy could not help lifting his eyes from the red hand to the

face. But he recoiled and turned pale; he had just recognized in the owner of this hand, Gertrude, half-hidden beneath a black veil.

He stood there with his arm extended, and never thought of making the sign of the cross, while Gertrude bowed and passed on; but behind Gertrude, whose robust elbows made way for her, came a woman, carefully wrapped in a silk mantle,—a woman whose elegant and youthful figure, charming foot, and slender waist recalled to Bussy's mind the fact that there was only one woman in the world so charming.

Rémy said nothing; he only looked at him. Bussy now understood why the young man had brought him to the Rue Sainte-Marie-l'Egyptienne and made him enter the church.

Bussy followed this woman; Le Haudoin followed Bussy.

This procession of four people following each other at equal distances would have been very amusing if the pallor and sadness of two of them had not betrayed cruel sufferings.

Gertrude, who walked on before, turned the corner of the Rue Montmartre, walked a few steps, then suddenly entered an alley on which opened a door. Bussy hesitated.

"Well, Monsieur le Comte," said Rémy, "shall I walk on your heels?"

Bussy walked on.

Gertrude, who still led the way, drew a key from her pocket, and made way for her mistress, who entered without turning her head.

Le Haudoin spoke a few words to the maid, and stood aside to let Bussy pass; then he and Gertrude entered together, closed the door, and the alley was once more deserted.

It was half-past seven in the evening, in the early part of May; the first leaves were beginning to open in the balmy air that heralded the approach of spring. Bussy looked around, and found himself in a little garden about

ifty feet square, surrounded by very high walls covered with moss and vines, whose tendrils often detached bits of stone and plaster, and perfumed the night air with the fresh and vigorous odor of their leaves.

Wall-flowers grew out of the cracks in the old church wall, and joyously showed their buds, red as pure copper.

Finally, the first lilacs, which had bloomed that very morning, sent out their sweet perfumes; and the young man, who, one hour before, had been so weak, so lonely, and so abandoned, asked himself if all this perfume, this warmth, this life did not come from the mere presence of the woman he loved so tenderly.

On a little wooden bench, placed near the church and shaded by jessamines and clematis, sat Diane, with her head bowed down, and her hands listlessly tearing to pieces a flower whose petals fell on the sand.

At this moment a nightingale, hidden in a neighboring chestnut-tree, began its long and melancholy song, enlivened from time to time with joyous notes.

Bussy was alone in the garden with Madame de Monsoreau, for Rémy and Gertrude stood at a distance. He approached; Diane raised her head.

"Monsieur le Comte," she said in a timid voice, "all subterfuge would be unworthy of us; if you found me just now in the Rue Sainte-Marie-l'Egyptienne it is not chance that led you thither."

"No, madame," said Bussy. "Le Haudois took me out without my knowing where I was going, and I assure you that I was ignorant—"

"You have mistaken the meaning of my words, monsieur," said Diane, with sadness. "Yes, I know that Monsieur Rémy brought you to this church, and perhaps by force."

"Madame," said Bussy, "it was not by force, and I did not know whom I was to see."

"These are harsh words, Monsieur le Comte," murmured Diane, shaking her head and raising her tearful eyes to Bussy. "Do you wish me to understand that

had you known Rémy's secret, you would not have accompanied him?"

"Oh, madame!"

"It is natural and just, monsieur. You did me a great service, and I have not yet thanked you for your courtesy. Pardon me, and receive my thanks."

"Madame—" Bussy stopped; he was so bewildered that he could command neither his thoughts nor his words.

"But I wish to prove to you," continued Diane, becoming more animated, "that I am neither an ungrateful woman nor have I a forgetful heart. It was I who begged Monsieur Rémy to procure for me the honor of this interview; it was I who indicated the place of meeting. Forgive me if I have displeased you."

Bussy placed his hand over his heart.

"Oh, madame," he said, "you do not think that!"

Ideas were beginning to return to this poor broken-hearted man; it seemed to him that this gentle evening breeze, which brought him such sweet perfumes and tender words, at the same time removed the cloud which was before his eyes.

"I know," said Diane, who was the more composed, because she had long been preparing this interview,—"I know all the trouble you had in fulfilling my commission; I know all your delicacy; I know you, and appreciate you, be assured. Think what I must have suffered at the thought that you would misunderstand the sentiments of my heart."

"Madame," said Bussy, "for three days I have been ill."

"Yes, I know," said Diane, with a blush which betrayed all the interest she took in this illness; "and I suffered more than you, because Monsieur Rémy—he no doubt deceived me—made me believe—"

"That your forgetfulness caused my suffering? It is true."

"Then I was right to do as I did," replied Madame de Monsoreau; "to see you, to thank you for your kindness,

and to swear to you an eternal gratitude. Now, believe that I speak from the bottom of my heart."

Bussy shook his head sadly, and did not reply.

" Do you doubt my words ? " continued Diane.

" Madame," replied Bussy, " those who feel friendship show it as best they can. You knew I was at the palace on the night of your presentation ; you knew I was close to you ; you must have felt the weight of my glance, yet not once did you raise your eyes ; not by a word, sign, or gesture did you let me know that you were aware of my presence. Now, perhaps I was wrong, and you did not recognize me ; you had seen me only twice, madame."

Diane answered by a glance so sadly reproachful that Bussy was moved.

" Forgive me, madame, forgive me ! " he said ; " you are not a woman like all others, and yet you act like them. This marriage ? "

" Do you not know how I was forced to it ? "

" Yes ; but it was easy to break it."

" On the contrary, impossible."

" Did nothing tell you that a devoted friend watched over you ? "

Diane looked down.

" It was specially that which made me fear."

" And you sacrificed me to these considerations ? Oh, think what my life will be, now that you belong to another ! "

" Monsieur," said the countess with dignity, " a woman cannot change her name without great detriment to her honor when there live two men, the one bearing the name she has given up, the other the name she has taken ! "

" So you keep the name of Monsoreau from choice ? " he asked.

" Do you think so ? " murmured Diane. " So much the better." And her eyes filled with tears. Bussy, who saw her head drop on her bosom, walked up and down before her in a state of agitation.

" Well," he said, " I have once more become what I was before,—a stranger to you, madame."

" Alas ! " said Diane.

" Your silence speaks plainly enough."

" I can only speak by my silence."

" Your silence, madame, is the sequel of your greeting at the Louvre. At the Louvre you did not see me ; here you do not speak to me."

" At the Louvre I was in the presence of M. de Monsoreau. M. de Monsoreau looked at me ; he was jealous."

" Jealous ! Well, what does he want, *mon Dieu !* What happiness can he envy when every one envies his happiness ? "

" I tell you he is jealous, monsieur. For the past two or three days he has seen some one wandering around our new abode."

" You have, then, left the little house of the Rue Saint-Antoine ? "

" What ! " cried Diane, thoughtlessly, " this man was not you ? "

" Madame, since the public announcement of your marriage, since your presentation, since that evening at the Louvre when you did not even look at me, I have been in bed ill, dying with fever. You see that your husband could not be jealous of me, since it was not I he saw wandering around your house."

" If it be true, as you say, Monsieur le Comte, that you had some desire to see me again, thank this stranger ; for, knowing M. de Monsoreau as I know him, this man made me tremble for your safety, and I wished to see you and say to you, ' Do not expose yourself so, monsieur ; and do not make me more unhappy than I am.' "

" Reassure yourself, madame ; I repeat it was not I."

" Now let me finish what I have to say to you. For fear of this man,—whom I do not know, but whom M. de Monsoreau does perhaps,—he demands that I should leave Paris ; so that," added Diane, extending her hand to the count, " you may look upon this as our last meeting, monsieur. To-morrow we start for Méridor."

" You are going, madame ? " cried Bussy.

" There is no other way to reassure M. de Monsoreau. This is the only way for me to have peace. Besides, I myself hate Paris, the world, the court, and the Louvre. I am happy at the thought of retiring to the home of my childhood. It seems to me that in walking through those same paths some of my former happiness will drop on my head, like the dew from heaven. My father accompanies me, and I shall find there M. and Madame de Saint-Luc, who regret my absence. Farewell, M. de Bussy ! "

Bussy hid his face in his hands. " Ah, " he murmured, " all is over for me ! "

" What are you saying there ? " asked Diane, rising.

" Madame, I say that this man exiles you ; that he takes from me the only hope that was left me,—that of breathing the same air as yourself ; of seeing you sometimes at your window ; of touching your dress as you pass ; of adoring a living being, and not a shadow. I say that this man is my mortal enemy ; and should it cost me my life, I will destroy him with my own hands."

" Oh, Monsieur le Comte ! "

" The wretch ! " cried Bussy. " What ! it is not enough for him that you are his wife,—you, the purest and most beautiful of creatures ; but he must be jealous, jealous ! The ridiculous and devouring monster would absorb the whole world."

" Oh, calm yourself, count. *Mon Dieu !* he may be excusable."

" Excusable ! Do you defend him, madame ? "

" Oh, if you knew ! " said Diane, covering her face with both her hands, as though she feared Bussy might see her blushes in spite of the darkness.

" If I knew ? " repeated Bussy. " Eh, madame, I know one thing,—he that is your husband is wrong to think of the rest of the world."

" But, " said Diane, in a broken, passionate voice, " if you were wrong, Monsieur le Comte, and if he were not."

And the young woman, touching with her cold hand Bussy's burning ones, rose and fled as light as a shadow.

through the dark alleys of the little garden, seized Gertrude's arm, and disappeared with her before Bussy, overwhelmed, mad and radiant with delight, had time to stretch out his arms to hold her.

He uttered a cry and tottered. Rémy reached him just in time to catch him in his arms and make him sit on the bench which Diane had just left.

CHAPTER XLIV.

HOW D'EPERNON'S DOUBLET WAS TORN, AND HOW SCHOMBERG WAS STAINED BLUE.

WHILE Maître la Hurière accumulated signatures, while Chicot consigned Gorenflot to the Corne d'Abondance, while Bussy returned to life in the little garden filled with perfume, songs and love,—Henri, annoyed at all he had seen in the city, irritated by what he had heard in the churches, and furious against his brother whom he had seen in the Rue Saint-Honoré accompanied by M. de Guise, M. de Mayenne, and a train of gentlemen apparently commanded by M. de Monsoreau,—Henri, we say, had returned to the Louvre in company with Maugiron and Quélus.

The king, according to his habit, had gone out with his four friends ; but at a short distance from the Louvre, Schomberg and D'Epernon, annoyed by the king's ill-humor, and counting on meeting with some adventures in this crowd, took advantage of the first crush to disappear at the corner of the Rue de l'Astruce ; and while the king and his two friends continued their walk along the quay, they were carried down the Rue d'Orleans.

They had not gone a hundred yards before each one had found what he sought. D'Epernon passed his cane between the legs of a *bourgeois* who was running, and who consequently tumbled down ; and Schomberg had pulled the cap off the head of a woman whom he thought

old and ugly, and who turned out to be young and pretty.

But both had badly chosen their day for attacking those good Parisians, usually so patient ; everywhere was to be felt that fever of revolt whose wings sometimes puched the walls of the capital. The *bourgeois* rose from the ground and cried out, "Down with the heretic !" As he was zealous, the others believed him, and rushed upon D'Epernon. The young woman had cried, "Down with the favorite !" which was much worse ; and her husband, who was a dyer, sent his apprentices after Schomberg. Schomberg was brave ; so he made a stand, poked out boldly, and placed his hand on his sword. D'Epernon was prudent, and fled.

Henri had not troubled himself about his two favorites, knowing they were able to get out of scrapes,—the one with his legs, the other with his arms. He therefore continued his walk, and when he had finished it, returned to the Louvre, as we have seen.

He had entered his room, and was seated in his armchair, trembling with impatience, and seeking a good subject on which to vent his anger.

Maugiron was playing with Narcissus, the king's large reyhound ; Quélus, with his cheeks resting on his hands, was lounging on cushions and looking at Henri.

"There they go !" said the king. "Their plot is working. Sometimes serpents, sometimes tigers ; when they do not spring, they crawl."

"Eh, sire," said Quélus, "are there not always plots in a kingdom ? How in the devil would you occupy the brothers and cousins of kings if they did not plot ?"

"Really, Quélus, your maxims are absurd ; and with your puffed cheeks you remind me of Gilles of the fair of Saint-Laurent."

Quélus whirled on his cushions and irreverently turned his back on the king.

"Come, Maugiron," resumed Henri, "am I right or wrong ? *Mordieu !* and must I be soothed with twaddles

and nonsense, as if I were an ordinary king, or a linen draper who fears to lose his pet cat ? ”

“ Well, sire,” said Maugiron, who was always and in all things of the same opinion as Quélus, “ if you are not an ordinary king, prove it by showing yourself a great king. How the devil ! here is Narcissus who is a good dog, but when you pull his ears he growls, and if you step on his tail he bites.”

“ Good ! ” said Henri, “ here is the other one who likens me to my dog.”

“ Not at all, sire,” said Maugiron ; “ you see, on the contrary, that I set Narcissus far above you, since he knows how to defend himself while your Majesty does not.”

And he too turned his back on Henri.

“ Well, here I am alone,” said the king. “ Very well continue, my good friends, for whom they accuse me of despoiling the kingdom ; abandon me, insult me, kill me. Upon my word, I am surrounded by tormentors. Ah, Chicot, my poor Chicot, where are you ? ”

“ Well,” said Quélus, “ here he is calling for Chicot now.”

“ That is very simple,” replied Maugiron, and the insolent fellow began to mutter between his teeth a certain Latin axiom which might be translated, “ Birds of a feather flock together.”

Henri frowned, and a look of terrible anger flashed from his large black eyes ; this time it was a right royal look that the king gave his indiscreet favorites. But no doubt exhausted by this sudden spark of anger, Henri fell back in his chair and rubbed the ears of one of the little dogs in his basket.

At this moment a rapid footstep was heard in the ante-chamber, and D'Epernon appeared without hat or cloak and with his doublet all torn. Quélus and Maugiron turned round ; and Narcissus ran barking at the new comer as if he only recognized the king's courtiers by their clothes.

“ Good God ! ” cried Henri, “ what has happened to you ? ”

"Look at me, sire, and see how your Majesty's friends are treated."

"And who treated you so?"

"*Mordieu!* your subjects, or rather those of M. le Duc d'Anjou, for they were crying, '*Vive la Ligue! vive la Messe! Vive Guise! Vive François!*' In fact, they cheered for every one except for the king."

"Well, what had you done to the people to be treated in this manner?"

"I? nothing. What can one man do to the people? I was recognized for one of your Majesty's friends, and that sufficed."

"But Schomberg?"

"What about Schomberg?"

"He did not come to your assistance? He did not defend you?"

"*Corbœuf!* Schomberg had enough to do taking care of himself!"

"How so?"

"I left him in the hands of a dyer, whose wife's hat he had pulled off, and who with the aid of five or six apprentices was making him have a rather hard time of it."

"*Par la mordieu!* where did you leave my poor Schomberg?" cried Henri, rising. "I shall go to his assistance myself. They may be able to say that my friends abandon me," added the king, looking at Maugiron and Quélus, "but no one shall ever say that I abandon my friends."

"Thank you, sire," said a voice behind Henri, "thanks! but here I am. *Gott verdamme mich!* I extricated myself without assistance, but not without difficulty."

"Oh, it is Schomberg's voice," cried the three favorites, "but where the devil is he?"

"*Parbleu!* you see where I am," cried the same voice, and from the darker portion of the room, they saw coming towards them, not a man, but a shadow.

"Schomberg!" cried the king, "where do you come from, and why are you of that color?"

In fact Schomberg, from head to foot and without excepting any portion of his person or his garments, was of a most beautiful shade of royal blue.

“*Der Teufel!*” he cried, “the wretches! I am not surprised that all the people ran after me.”

“But what is the matter?” asked Henri. “If you were yellow that might be explained by fright,—but blue!”

“The matter is that they dipped me in a vat, the rascals! I thought they were only dipping me in water, and it was indigo.”

“Oh, *mordieu!*” said Quélus, bursting out laughing, “they are punished for their sin. Indigo is very expensive, and you must have carried off about twenty crowns of dye.”

“I advise you to joke; I wish you had been in my place.”

“And you did not rip open any of them?” asked Maugiron.

“All I know is that I left my dagger somewhere sheathed in flesh; but all was over in a second. I was taken, picked up, dipped in the vat, and nearly drowned.”

“And how did you get away from them?”

“I had the courage to perform an act of cowardice,”

“And what did you do?”

“I cried ‘*Vive la Ligue!*’”

“So did I,” said D’Epernon, “only they made me add ‘*Vive le Duc d’Anjou!*’”

“I had to do the same,” said Schomberg, biting his fingers with rage. “But that is not yet all.”

“What!” said the king, “did they make you cry out something else, my poor Schomberg?”

“No, they made me cry nothing else, thank God! that was enough; but just as I was crying, ‘*Vive le Duc d’Anjou!*’—”

“Well?”

“Guess who passed?”

“How can I guess?”

"Bussy,—his cursed Bussy,—who heard me."

"The fact is, he must have been at a loss what to make of it," said Quélus.

"*Parbleu!* it was not difficult to understand. I had a dagger at my throat, and I was in a vat."

"What!" said Maugiron, "he did not come to your assistance? Nevertheless, he owed it to you as a gentleman."

"He seemed to be thinking of very different things; he only needed wings to fly away; he hardly seemed to touch the ground."

"And then," said Maugiron, "he may not have recognized you."

"A very poor reason."

"Were you already dyed blue?"

"Ah, that is true!" said Schomberg.

"In that case he would be excusable," replied Henri, "because really, my poor Schomberg, I myself do not recognize you."

"Never mind," replied the young man, who was not German for nothing, "we shall meet some day when I shall not be in a vat."

"Oh, as for me," said D'Epernon, "it is not the servant against whom I bear a grudge, but the master. It is not Bussy that I wish to punish; it is Monseigneur the Duc d'Anjou."

"Yes, yes!" cried Schomberg, "Monseigneur d'Anjou, who wishes to kill us with ridicule while waiting to kill us with a dagger."

"The Duc d'Anjou, whose praises were being sung in the streets. You heard them, sire," said Maugiron and Quélus together.

"The fact is, that the duke seems to be master of Paris and not the king; try to go out and see if you will be treated with more respect than we were," said D'Epernon.

"Ah, my brother, my brother!" murmured Henri, in a menacing tone.

"Ah, sire, you will repeat more than once what you

have just said ; but you will do nothing against him," said Schomberg. " Yet I declare it is clear to me that this brother is at the head of some plot."

" Eh, *mordieu* ! that is exactly what I was saying to these gentlemen when you came in just now, D'Epernon ; but they replied by shrugging their shoulders and turning their backs."

" Sire," said Maugiron, " we shrugged our shoulders and we turned our backs, not because you said there was a plot, but because we saw you were in no mood to suppress it."

" And now," continued Quélus, " we turn to you to say, ' Save us, sire, or rather, save yourself ; for if we fall, you perish. To-morrow, M. le Duc de Guise will come to the Louvre and ask you to appoint a chief for the League ; to-morrow you will appoint the Duc d'Anjou, as you promised to do. And once chief of the League' — that is to say, at the head of one hundred thousand men excited by this night's orgies,—the Duc d'Anjou will do with you whatever he wishes."

" Ah, ah," said Henri, " if I take a decisive step, will you be disposed to support me ? "

" Yes, sire," replied the young men with one voice.

" Provided your Majesty will give me time to put on another cap, another cloak, and another doublet," said D'Epernon.

" Go into my room, D'Epernon, and my valet will give you all that ; we are of the same size."

" And provided you will give me time to take a bath."

" Go into my bath-room, Schomberg, and my bather will attend to you."

" Sire," said Schomberg, " may we hope that the insult will be avenged ? "

Henri extended his hand to command silence, and looking down, seemed buried in thought ; after a short pause he said,—

" Quélus, ask if M. d'Anjou has returned to the Louvre."

Quélus went out. D'Epernon and Schomberg awaited

with the others Quélus return, so much was their zeal revived by the imminence of the danger. It is not during a storm, but in the calm, that sailors become mutinous.

“Sire,” asked Maugiron, “has your Majesty decided on a course of action?”

“You will see,” replied the king.

Quélus returned.

“M. le Duc has not yet come in,” he said.

“Very well,” said the king. “D'Epernon, go and change your clothes; Schomberg, go and change your color. Quélus and Maugiron, go down and watch for my brother's return.”

“And when he returns?”

“Have all the doors shut; now go.”

“Bravo, sire!” said Quélus.

“I shall be back in ten minutes, sire,” said D'Epernon.

“I cannot say when I shall be back; that depends on the quality of the dye,” said Schomberg.

“Come as soon as possible,” replied the king.

“But will your Majesty remain alone?” asked Maugiron.

“No, Maugiron, I remain with God, whose protection I shall ask for our enterprise.”

“Pray Him well, sire,” said Quélus, “because I am beginning to think that He has made an agreement with the devil to damn us all in this world and the next.”

“Amen!” said Maugiron.

The two young men who were to watch went out through one door; the two who were to change their costumes went out through the other, and the king, left alone, knelt down on his *prie-Dieu*.

CHAPTER XLV.

CHICOT IS MORE THAN EVER KING OF FRANCE.

THE bells tolled midnight. The doors of the Louvre were usually closed at midnight; but Henri had wisely

calculated that the Duc d'Anjou would not fail to sleep at the Louvre that night, to afford less ground for the suspicions to which the tumult of Paris might have given rise in the king's mind. He had therefore given orders that the gates should remain open until one o'clock.

At a quarter after twelve Quélus came up.

"Sire, the duke has returned," he said.

"What is Maugiron doing?"

"Watching that he does not go out again."

"There is no danger."

"Then—" said Quélus, making a movement to indicate that there was nothing left but to act.

"Then—let him go to bed quietly," said the king.
"Who is with him?"

"M. de Monsoreau and his usual gentlemen."

"And M. de Bussy?"

"M. de Bussy is not there."

"Good!" said the king, greatly relieved to find his brother deprived of his best sword.

"What are the king's commands?" asked Quélus.

"Send word to D'Epernon and Schomberg to hasten and let M. de Monsoreau know that I wish to speak to him."

Quélus bowed, and executed the commission with a promptness due to the combination of hatred and the desire of vengeance united in a single heart.

Five minutes later, D'Epernon and Schomberg returned, the one newly dressed, the other having bathed; only the wrinkles of his face were still of a bluish tinge which, according to the bather, would disappear only after several steam baths.

Behind the two favorites came M. de Monsoreau.

"The captain of the guards has just told me that your Majesty did me the honor to summon me," said the master of the hounds, with a deep bow.

"Yes, monsieur," said Henri. "As I walked out this evening, I saw the stars so bright and the moon so fair that the idea came to me that we might have a splendid chase to-morrow, with such beautiful weather. It is

only twelve o'clock, Monsieur le Comte. Set out at once for Vincennes; harbor a stag for me, and to-morrow we shall hunt it."

"But, sire," said Monsoreau, "I thought your Majesty was to see Monseigneur d'Anjou and M. de Guise, to appoint a chief for the League."

"Well, monsieur, what of that?" asked the king, in a naughty tone, which admitted of no reply.

"After that, sire, there might not be time."

"There is always time, monsieur, when one knows how to employ it; this is why I say to you, 'You have time to set out to-night, provided you set out at once.' You have time to track a stag to-night and have everything in readiness for to-morrow at ten o'clock. Therefore, go at once! Quélus, Schomberg, accompany M. de Monsoreau, and have the gate of the Louvre opened for him, and have it closed again, by order of the king."

The master of the hounds withdrew in astonishment.

"Is this a whim of the king's?" he asked the two young men, as they passed through the ante-chamber.

"Yes," laconically replied the latter.

M. de Monsoreau saw he could learn nothing from them and was silent.

"Oh, oh!" he murmured to himself, as he glanced towards the Duc d'Anjou's apartments, "this does not seem very promising for his Royal Highness."

But there was no way of sending a word of warning to the prince. Quélus and Schomberg stood, one on his right, and the other on his left. For one moment he imagined that the two favorites had special orders, and held him prisoner; and it was only when he stood outside the Louvre, and heard the gate close behind him, that he understood that his suspicions were unfounded.

At the end of ten minutes, Schomberg and Quélus had returned to the king.

"Now," said Henri, "silence, and follow me, all four."

"Where are we going, sire?" asked the ever-prudent Epernon.

"Those who come, will see," replied the king.

"Come!" said the four young men, with one voice.

The favorites saw to their swords, fastened their cloaks, and followed the king, who, with a lantern in his hand, conducted them through the secret corridor we already know, and through which the queen-mother and King Charles IX. had passed more than once, to visit Queen Margot, whose apartments were now occupied by the Duc d'Anjou.

A valet was watching in this corridor; but before he had time to run back and give warning to his master, Henri had seized him, commanded him to be silent, and handed him to his favorites, who pushed him into a closet, the door of which they locked.

It was therefore the king himself who turned the knob of Monseigneur the Duc d'Anjou's bedroom.

François had just gone to bed, filled with the dreams of ambition to which the events of the evening had given birth in his mind; he had heard his name exalted, and the king's name abused. Accompanied by the Duc de Guise, he had seen the people of Paris make way for him; and his gentlemen, while the king's favorites were hooted, insulted, and abused. Never since the beginning of that long career, so full of treacherous dealings and timid plots, had he been so advanced in popularity and therefore in hope.

He had just laid on the table a letter from M. de Guise brought by M. de Monsoreau, and in which Le Balafr enjoined upon him not to fail to be present at the king's levee, the next morning.

The Duc d'Anjou had no need of such a recommendation, as he had every intention of being present at his own triumph. His surprise was great when he saw the door of the secret passage open, and his terror reached its height when he recognized the king on the threshold. Henri signed to his companions to remain outside, and advanced towards the bed, grave, frowning, but silent.

"Sire," stammered the duke, "the honor that your Majesty confers on me is so unlooked for—"

"That it frightens you, does it not?" asked the king.

"I understand that. But, no, no ! remain, brother ; do not rise."

"But sire, permit me—" said the duke, trembling, and drawing towards him the *Duc de Guise's* letter, which he had just finished reading.

"You were reading ?" asked the king.

"Yes, sire."

"Something interesting, no doubt, since it kept you awake at this late hour."

"Oh, sire, nothing of great importance," replied the duke, with a frigid smile ; "only the evening mail."

"Yes," said Henri. "I understand that,—evening mail, Venus' mail. But no, I am mistaken ; seals of that dimension are not used on notes sent by Iris or Mercury."

The duke hid the letter altogether.

"That, dear François, is discreet," said the king, with a laugh, which greatly frightened his brother. However, the latter made an effort, and tried to recover some assurance.

"Does your Majesty wish to speak to me in private ?" asked the duke, who noticed from some movement on the part of the four young men at the door, that they were listening with pleasure to the beginning of this scene.

"What I have to say to you, monsieur," said the king, laying particular stress on this title, which was the one granted by etiquette to the sons of France, "you will allow me to say to-day before witnesses. Now, gentlemen," he continued, turning to the four young men, "listen ; the king permits it."

The duke raised his head.

"Sire," he said, with that glance full of hatred and venom which man has borrowed from the snake, "before insulting a man of my rank, you should have refused me the hospitality of the Louvre ; in the *Hôtel d'Anjou*, I should at least have been able to answer you."

"In truth," said Henri, with terrible irony, "you forget that wherever you may be, you are my subject, and that

every house is mine. Thank God, I am the king!—the king of the soil!"

"Sire," cried François, "I am at the Louvre, at my mother's."

"And your mother is in my house," replied Henri. "Come, let us be brief, monsieur; give me this paper."

"Reflect, sire," said the duke.

"About what?"

"That you are making a request unworthy of a gentleman, but in return, worthy of an officer of your police."

The king became livid.

"That letter, monsieur," he said.

"A woman's letter! Reflect, sire," said François.

"There are women's letters which are good to see, and very dangerous if not seen, particularly those written by our mother."

"Brother!" said François.

"That letter, monsieur," cried the king, stamping his foot; "that letter, or I shall have it taken from you by four Swiss."

The duke bounded out of bed, holding the letter in his hand, and with the evident intention of reaching the chimney to throw it into the fire.

"You would do that to your brother?" he asked.

"Not to my brother," he said, "but to my deadliest enemy. Not to my brother, but to the Duc d'Anjou, who has spent the whole evening running through the street of Paris behind M. de Guise; to my brother, who is trying to conceal from me the letter written by one or the other of his accomplices, the Lorraine princes."

"This time," said the duke, "your police is at fault."

"I tell you that I saw on the seal the three famous merlets of Lorraine which pretend to swallow the *fleur-de-lis* of France. Give it, *mordieu!* give it, or—"

Henri took one step towards the duke, and placed his hand on his shoulder.

François had no sooner felt the weight of the royal hand, and seen the threatening attitude of the favorite

who were beginning to draw their swords, than, falling on his knees near the bed, he cried,—

“ Help ! help ! my brother wants to kill me.”

These words, uttered in an accent of profound terror, prompted by conviction, made a great impression upon the king, and mitigated his rage. He thought that François could, in fact, fear assassination, and that this murderer would have been fratricide. The idea flashed quickly through his mind, that in his family, accursed like all those which are the last of a race, brothers always assassinated their brothers as by tradition.

“ No,” he said, “ you are wrong, brother, and the king wishes you no harm of the kind you seem to dread ; you have struggled, and should acknowledge yourself beaten. You know that the king is the master, or if you did not, you know it now. Well, say it, not only to yourself, but aloud.”

“ Oh, I say it, brother, and I proclaim it,” cried the duke.

“ Very well ; now this letter. The king orders you to give up that letter.”

The Duc d’Anjou dropped the paper. The king picked it up, and without reading it, folded it and placed it in his pouch.

“ Is this all, sire ? ” asked the duke, with his sinister lance.

“ No, monsieur,” said Henri. “ As a punishment for his rebellion, which, fortunately, was not attended with any evil results, you must remain in your room until all my doubts about you are completely cleared. You are here, and the apartment is comfortable, and not too much like a prison, therefore remain. You will have good company on the other side of the door, at least ; for to-night these four gentlemen will keep guard. To-morrow they will be replaced by a picket of Swiss.”

“ But my own friends ! Shall I not be able to see them ? ”

“ Whom do you call your friends ? ”

“ M. de Monsoreau, for instance, M. de Ribeirac, M. Antraguet, M. de Bussy.”

“ Oh, I advise you to speak of the latter ! ”

“ Has he had the misfortune to displease your Majesty ? ”

“ Yes,” said the king.

“ When ? ”

“ Always, and particularly to-night.”

“ To-night ? What has he done to-night ? ”

“ He had me insulted in the streets of Paris.”

“ You, sire ? ”

“ Yes,—or my friends, which amounts to the same.”

“ Bussy had some one insulted in the streets of Paris to-night ? You have been deceived, sire.”

“ I know what I am saying.”

“ Sire,” cried the duke, triumphantly, ‘ M. de Bussy has not left his *hôtel* for two days. He is at home in bed, ill, and burning with fever.”

The king turned towards Schomberg.

“ If he were burning with fever,” said the young man, “ it was not in his own home, but in the Rue Coquillièr.”

“ Who told you that Bussy was in the Rue Coquillièr ? ” asked the Duc d’Anjou.

“ I saw him.”

“ You saw Bussy out ? ”

“ Bussy ; fresh, joyous, and seeming to be the happiest man on earth, accompanied by his usual attendant, Rémy, that squire, doctor, or whatever he may be.”

“ Then I can understand nothing,” said the duke, in a stupor. “ I saw M. de Bussy during the evening. He was buried under blankets. He must have deceived me.”

“ Very well,” said the king. “ M. de Bussy will be punished like the rest and with the rest, when matters are explained.”

The duke, who thought he might divert the king’s anger from himself on to Bussy, made no further attempt to defend his follower.

“ If M. de Bussy has done this,” he said ; “ if after refusing to go out with me he went out alone, he must have had some intentions which he could not acknowledge to me, whose devotion to your Majesty he knows so well.”

" You hear what my brother pretends," said the king ; " he says he did not authorize M. de Bussy."

" So much the better," said Schomberg.

" Why so much the better ? "

" Because your Majesty may then let us do as we wish."

" Very well, very well ; we shall see later," said Henri.

" Gentlemen, I recommend my brother to your care ; as you will have the honor of guarding him, treat him with all the respect due to a prince of the blood—that is to say, the first in the kingdom after me."

" Oh, sire," said Quélus, with a glance which made the duke shiver, " rest assured that we know all that we owe to his Highness."

" Very well, adieu, gentlemen," said Henri.

" Sire," cried the duke, more frightened by the absence of the king than he had been by his presence, " am I seriously a prisoner ; my friends will not be able to visit me ? I shall not be able to go out ? "

The thought of the next day flashed through his mind,—of that next day when his presence was so necessary near M. de Guise.

" Sire," said the duke, who saw that the king was about to yield, " let me at least appear near your Majesty ; my place is near your Majesty. I am a prisoner there as well as anywhere else, and better watched there than elsewhere. Sire, grant me the favor of remaining near your Majesty."

The king, on the point of granting the duke's request, which he did not find objectionable, was about to say " Yes," when his attention was diverted from his brother to the door, where a very long and agile body was making with its neck, arms, head,—in fact, with every movable portion of itself,—the most emphatically negative signs.

It was Chicot who was saying " No."

" No," said Henri to his brother ; " you are very comfortable here, and it suits me that you should remain."

" Sire ! " stammered the duke.

" When such is the king's good pleasure, it seems to me

that should suffice, monsieur," added Henri, with a haughty air which completely crushed the duke.

"When I said I was the real King of France!" murmured Chicot.

CHAPTER XLVI.

HOW CHICOT PAID A VISIT TO BUSSY, AND WHAT FOLLOWED.

ON the day following this night, Bussy was quietly breakfasting at about nine o'clock in the morning, with Rémy, who, in his capacity of a physician, ordered nourishing food; they were talking over the events of the preceding day, and Rémy was trying to remember the inscriptions on the frescoes of Sainte-Marie-l'Egyptienne.

"Tell me, Rémy," suddenly asked Bussy, "did you not fancy you recognized the gentleman who was being dipped in a vat at the corner of the Rue Coquillière?"

"Yes, Monsieur le Comte, and I have been trying ever since to recall his name."

"Then you did not recognize him?"

"He was already very blue."

"I should have gone to his assistance," said Bussy. "It is a duty one gentleman owes to another but in truth, Rémy, I was too busy with my own affairs."

"But if we did not recognize him," said Le Haudoin. "he surely recognized us, because we were of our natural color; and it seems to me he glared at us furiously, and shook his fist at us as he uttered some threat."

"Are you sure of that, Rémy?"

"I can answer for the looks; but I am less sure about the fists and the threats," said Le Haudoin, who knew Bussy's fiery temper.

"Then we must find out who this gentleman is, Rémy. I cannot allow such an insult to pass."

"Wait, wait!" cried Le Haudoin, as if he had com-

ut of cold water or jumped into hot water. "Oh, *mon Dieu !* I have it ! I know him ! "

"How ?"

"I heard him swear."

"*Mordieu !* I should think so. Any one would have worn under those circumstances."

"Yes, but he swore in German."

"Pshaw !"

"He said, '*Gott verdamme !*'"

"Then it was Schomberg."

"Himself, Monsieur le Comte, himself !"

"Then, my dear Rémy, prepare your ointments."

"Why so ?"

"Because before long you will have to mend his skin
mine."

"You will not be mad enough to have yourself killed
hen you are in such good health, and so happy ?" asked Rémy, with a knowing wink. "Saint Mary the
gyptian has already resurrected you once, and she
ight weary of performing a miracle which Christ himself
ied only twice."

"On the contrary, Rémy," said the count, "you
annot imagine how pleasant it is to risk one's life when
he is happy. I assure you that I never fought with a
ood heart when I had lost a large sum at cards, when I
ad surprised my mistress betraying me, or when I had
omething on my mind ; but, on the contrary, whenever
y purse is full, my heart light, and my conscience clear,
go boldly on to the field : I am sure of my hand, I read
through my antagonist, and crush him with my superi-
ity. I am in the position of a man who plays cards and
els his adversary's gold pushed into his hand. Then is
e time I am brilliant. I shall fight admirably to-day,
émy," said the young man, holding out his hand to the
ctor, " for, thanks to you, I am very happy."

"Stop a moment !" said Le Haudoin ; "you will
lease forego that pleasure. A fair lady of my acquaint-
ice has recommended you to me, and made we swear to
ep you safe and sound under pretext that you already .

owe her your life and that one cannot dispose of that which one owes."

"Good Rémy!" said Bussy, losing himself in that mist of thought which allows the man in love to see and hear all that is said and done as on the stage we see objects through a gauze veil which conceals their angles and glaring colors,—a delightful condition which is almost a dream; for while the soul follows its sweet and faithful thought, the senses are diverted by the words and gestures of a friend.

"You call me 'good Rémy' because I took you to see Madame de Monsoreau; but will you still call me so when you will be separated from her?—and unfortunately the day approaches, if it has not already dawned."

"What is that?" cried Bussy, with energy. "Let us not jest on that subject, Maître le Haudoin."

"Eh, monsieur, I am not jesting. Do you not know that if she departs for Anjou, I too shall have the sorrow of being separated from Mademoiselle Gertrude?—ah!"

Bussy could not help smiling at Rémy's pretended despair.

"Do you love her very much?" he asked.

"I should think so! And she,—if you knew how she beats me!"

"And you let her?"

"For the love of science; I have been forced to invent a salve which causes all black-and-blue spots to disappear at once."

"In that case, you should send a few pots to Schorberg."

"Let us speak no more of Schomberg. It is understood that we shall leave him to get clean as best he can."

"Yes, and let us return to Madame de Monsoreau, rather to Diane de Méridor, because you know—"

"Oh, *mon Dieu!* yes, I know."

"Rémy, when do we start?"

"Ah, this is what I expected! As late as possible, Monsieur le Comte."

"Why so?"

"First, because we have here M. le Duc d'Anjou, who seems to have managed his affairs in such a way last night that he will evidently have need of us."

"Well, what next?"

"Then because M. de Monsoreau, by a special blessing, suspects nothing, at least so far as you are concerned; and that he would suspect something if he saw you disappear from Paris at the same moment as his wife who is not his wife."

"Well, what if he should suspect?"

"Oh, it matters greatly to me, my dear count. I undertake to mend all the sword-cuts you receive in duels, because, as you are an unequalled swordsman, you never receive any very serious ones; but I refuse the dagger thrusts given by jealous husbands in ambushes. In such cases, they are animals who strike hard; look at that poor Saint-Mégrin, who was so cruelly put to death by our friend M. de Guise."

"Well, my friend, suppose it is my fate to be killed by M. de Monsoreau?"

"Well?"

"Well, he will kill me."

"And then a week, a month, or a year afterwards, Madame de Monsoreau will marry her husband,—a fact which will cause great torment to your poor soul that will look on from above, or below, without being able to oppose it, as it will have no body."

"You are right, Rémy, I wish to live."

"Very good! But it is not sufficient to be alive; believe me, you must follow my advice and be charming for Monsoreau. He is at present horribly jealous of M. le Duc d'Anjou, who, while you were in bed, ill with fever, was wandering beneath the lady's windows like an amoured Spaniard, and was recognized, thanks to his 'Aurilly. Make all sorts of advances to this husband, and do not even pretend to ask him what has become of his wife (that is useless, since you already know), and he will spread the report everywhere that you are the

only gentleman possessing Scipio's virtues,—sobriety and chastity."

" I think you are right," said Bussy. " Now that I am no longer jealous of the bear, I will tame him, and that will be supremely comical. Ah, Rémy, you may now ask me what you will ; all is easy for me,—I am happy."

At this moment some one knocked at the door and the two friends were silent.

" Who is there ? " asked Bussy.

" Monseigneur," said the page, " there is a gentleman below who wishes to speak to you."

" To speak to me so early ? Who is it ? "

" A tall gentleman, dressed in green velvet with rose-colored stockings. He has a rather comical face, but the appearance of an honest man."

" Eh," thought Bussy aloud, " can it be Schomberg ? "

" He said a tall gentleman."

" That is true. Or Monsoreau ? "

" He said ' the appearance of an honest man.' "

" You are right," said Bussy, " it can be neither the one nor the other ; ask him in."

The visitor soon appeared on the threshold.

" Ah, *mon Dieu !*" cried Bussy, quickly rising on catching sight of the new-comer, while Rémy discreetly retired into an adjoining closet, " Monsieur Chicot ! "

" In person, Monsieur le Comte," replied the Gascon.

Bussy's eyes were fixed upon him with an astonishment which said as plainly as words,—

" Monsieur, what have you come for ? "

Without being questioned any further, Chicot replied in a very serious tone,—

" Monsieur, I have come to propose a little bargain to you."

" Speak, monsieur," replied Bussy, with surprise.

" What will you promise me if I render you a great service ? "

" That depends on the service," replied Bussy, rather scornfully.

The Gascon pretended not to observe this scornful air

“ Monsieur,” he said, sitting down and crossing his long legs, “ I observe you have not invited me to sit down.”

Bussy reddened.

“ This is to be added to my reward for the service I shall render you,” he continued.

Bussy made no reply.

“ Monsieur,” said Chicot, not in the least disconcerted, “ do you know the League ? ”

“ I have heard a great deal about it,” replied Bussy, who now began to pay some attention to the words of the Gascon.

“ Well, monsieur,” said Chicot, “ you must know that it is an association of honest Christians, formed for the purpose of religiously massacring their neighbors the Huguenots. Do you belong to the League, monsieur ? I do.”

“ But, monsieur—”

“ You have only to say yes or no.”

“ Permit me to be surprised,” said Bussy.

“ I had the honor of asking you if you belonged to the League ; did you hear me ? ”

“ Monsieur Chicot,” said Bussy, “ as I do not like questions which I do not understand, I beg you to change the conversation, and I will wait a few minutes for the sake of courtesy before repeating to you that, not liking questions, I naturally do not like questioners.”

“ Very well, ‘ courtesy is courteous,’ as M. de Monsoreau says when he is in a good humor.”

At this name of Monsoreau, which the Gascon had uttered without apparent intention, Bussy listened again.

“ Eh,” he murmured to himself, “ does he suspect something, and has he sent Chicot to spy on me ? ” then loud, “ Come, Monsieur Chicot, to the point ; you know that we have only a few minutes.”

“ *Optime !* ” said Chicot. “ Well, in a few moments we can say a great deal ; I shall therefore say that I might have dispensed with questioning you, because if you are not of the Holy League, you will soon be, since M. d’Anjou is a member.”

“ M. d’Anjou ? Who told you so ? ”

“ Himself, speaking to my person, according to the formula used by the fraternity of lawyers ; for example, by that good and dear M. Nicolas David, the light of the *forum parisiense*,—a light which was extinguished, though no one knows who blew it out. Now understand that if M. le Duc d’Anjou belongs to the League, you cannot help belonging to it also,—you who are his right arm. The League knows better than to accept a maimed chief.”

“ Well, Monsieur Chicot, what next ? ” asked Bussy in a far more courteous tone than he had yet used.

“ What next ? ” asked Chicot. “ Well, if you belong to it or if they think you are likely to belong, what has happened to his Royal Highness will certainly happen to you.”

“ What has happened to his Royal Highness ? ” cried Bussy.

“ Monsieur,” said Chicot, rising and imitating the attitude taken by Bussy a moment before, “ monsieur I do not like questions ; and if you will permit me to say so at once, I do not like questioners. I have therefore a great mind to let them do to you what has already been done to your master.”

“ Monsieur Chicot,” said Bussy, with a smile containing all the excuses that a gentleman can make, “ speak, pray you. Where is M. le Duc ? ”

“ He is in prison.”

“ Where ? ”

“ In his room. Four of my good friends guard him,—M. de Schomberg, who was dyed blue last night, as you know, since you passed by at the moment of the operation ; M. d’Epernon, who is yellow from the fright he had ; M. de Quélus, who is red with anger ; and M. d’Maugiron, who is white with *ennui*. It is beautiful to see to say nothing of M. le Duc, who is beginning to turn green with terror, so that we privileged ones of the Louvre we shall soon have a perfect rainbow to delight our eyes.”

“ Therefore, monsieur,” said Bussy, “ you think there is some danger for my liberty ? ”

“ Danger ; stop a moment, monsieur. I suppose they

ire—they may be—they should be on the way to arrest you."

Bussy started.

" Do you like the Bastille, M. de Bussy ? It is a place very suitable for meditations ; and M. Laurent Testu, the governor, gives very good fare to his prisoners."

" I would be sent to the Bastille ? " cried Bussy.

" Faith ! I must have in my pocket something like an order to take you there. Would you like to see it ? "

And Chicot drew from the pocket of his hose, wide enough to contain three legs of the size of his own, an order from the king, drawn up in due form, to apprehend, wherever he might be, M. Louis de Clermont, lord of Bussy d'Amboise.

" Written very nicely by M. de Quélus," said Chicot.

" Then, monsieur," cried Bussy, touched by Chicot's action, " you are really rendering me a service ? "

" Well, I think so," said the Gascon. " Do you agree with me, monsieur ? "

" Monsieur," said Bussy, " I beg you to treat me like a man of honor. Is it to injure me on some other occasion that you save me to-day ? —for you love the king, and the king does not love me."

" Monsieur le Comte," said Chicot, rising to bow, " I have you to save you ; now you may think what you will of my action."

" But how can I explain such kindness ? "

" Do you forget that I asked for a reward ? "

" True."

" Well ? "

" Ah, monsieur, most willingly ! "

" You will do what I shall ask of you some day ? "

" On my honor, if it be possible."

" Well, that satisfies me," said Chicot, rising. " Now mount your horse and disappear ; I shall carry this order to those for whom it is meant."

" You were not to arrest me yourself ? "

" For whom do you take me ? I am a gentleman, monsieur."

" But I abandon my master."

" Have no remorse ; he has already abandoned you."

" You are a gallant man, Monsieur Chicot," said Bussy to the Gascon.

" *Parbleu !* I know it," replied the latter.

Bussy called Le Haudoin, who, to do him justice, was listening behind the door.

" Rémy ! " he cried ; " Rémy, Rémy, our horses ! "

" They are saddled, monseigneur," calmly replied Rémy.

" Monsieur," said Chicot, " that young man has a great deal of intelligence."

" *Parbleu !* I know it," said Rémy ; and they saluted each other as Guillaume Gorin and Gauthier Gargouille might have done fifty years later.

Bussy took a few handfuls of crowns, which he crammed into his pockets and those of Rémy. After which bowing to Chicot, and thanking him again, he prepared to go down.

" Pardon me, monsieur," said Chicot, " but permit me to be present at your departure." And he followed Bussy and Le Haudoin to a little stable-yard where a page held two saddled horses.

" Where are we going ? " asked Rémy, carelessly picking up the reins.

" But—" said Bussy, hesitating, or seeming to hesitate.

" What do you say to Normandy, monsieur ? " asked Chicot, who was looking on, and examining the horse with a critical eye.

" No," replied Bussy ; " it is too near."

" What do you think of Flanders ? " continued Chicot.

" Too far."

" I think," said Rémy, " that you should decide for Anjou, which is at a reasonable distance,—eh, monsieur ? "

" Yes, let it be Anjou," said Bussy, with a blush.

" Monsieur," said Chicot, " since you have made your choice, and are about to start—"

"At this very moment."

"I have the honor of saluting you; remember me in our prayers." And the worthy gentleman walked off, grave and majestic, scraping the corners of the houses with his immense sword.

"It is destiny, monsieur," said Rémy.

"Come quickly," cried Bussy, "and we may perhaps overtake her."

"Ah, monsieur," said Le Haudoin, "if you aid chance you take away all its merit." And they set off.

CHAPTER XLVII.

CHICOT'S CHESS, QUÉLUS' CUP AND BALL, AND SCHOMBERG'S BLOW-GUN.

WE may safely say that Chicot, notwithstanding his apparent coldness, was returning to the Louvre in a perfectly joyful state of mind. He enjoyed the threefold satisfaction of having rendered a service to a brave man like Bussy, of having been engaged in an intrigue, and of having rendered possible for the king the political stroke which circumstances required. Indeed, what with Bussy's head, and particularly his heart, and the spirit of organization of MM. de Guise, a stormy day was likely to rise on the good city of Paris.

All that the king had feared, all that Chicot had foreseen, came to pass, as might have been expected.

M. de Guise, after having received in the morning the principal Leaguers, who had come from all sides to bring him the registers covered with signatures which we have seen in the squares, at the doors of the principal inns, and even on the altars of the churches; M. de Guise, after having promised a chief to the League, and made them all swear to recognize the chief whom the king would appoint; after having conferred with the cardinal and I. de Mayenne,—went out to visit M. le Duc d'Anjou,

whom he had lost sight of the night before at about ten o'clock.

Chicot had anticipated this visit, so on leaving Bussy he went at once to lounge in the neighborhood of the Hôtel d'Alençon, situated at the corner of the Rue Hautefeuille and the Rue Saint-André.

He had been there about a quarter of an hour when he saw the one he expected come down the Rue de la Huchette. Chicot hid himself at the corner of the Rue du Cimetière, and the Duc de Guise entered the *hôtel* without having perceived him.

The duke found the prince's valet rather uneasy about his master's absence, but he suspected what had taken place,—that the duke had slept at the Louvre. The duke asked if in the prince's absence he might not speak to D'Aurilly. The valet replied that D'Aurilly was in his master's room, and that he was at the duke's orders.

Guise accordingly went in.

D'Aurilly, the lute-player and confidant of the prince, was acquainted with all the Duc d'Anjou's secrets, and therefore better informed than any one as to his master's whereabouts.

D'Aurilly was quite as concerned as the valet, and from time to time he left his lute, on which his fingers wandered idly, to go to the window and look to see if the duke were not coming.

He had sent three times to the Louvre, and each time the answer had been that monseigneur, having returned very late, was still sleeping. M. de Guise asked D'Aurilly about the Duc d'Anjou. D'Aurilly had been separated from his master at the corner of the Rue de l'Arbre-Sec by a group which came to increase the crowd already assembled before the hostelry of the Belle Étoile; so that he had returned to the Hôtel d'Alençon without knowing anything of the duke's intention to spend the night at the Louvre.

The lute-player then told the prince of the three messengers he had sent to the Louvre, and repeated the identical answer brought by each of the three.

"It seems most unlikely that he should be asleep at eleven o'clock," said the duke; "the king himself is usually up at that hour. You should go to the Louvre, D'Aurilly!"

"I have thought of it, monseigneur," said D'Aurilly, "but I feared this pretended sleep might be only a tale invented to satisfy my messenger, while the duke is amusing himself somewhere in the city; now, if this is the case, Monseigneur might be annoyed at my seeking him."

"D'Aurilly," said the duke, "believe me, Monseigneur is too sensible a man to be amusing himself on a day like this. Go to the Louvre without fear, and there you will find him."

"I shall therefore go since you wish it, monsieur; but what shall I say to him?"

"Say that the convocation at the Louvre was for two o'clock, and that we were to confer together before meeting at the king's. You understand, D'Aurilly," said the duke, with a rather disrespectful display of temper, "that the time when the king is about to appoint chief for the League is no time for sleep."

"Very well, monseigneur; I shall tell his Highness to come here."

"Where I await him impatiently. Though the convocation is not until two o'clock, a great many are already assembled at the Louvre, and there is not a moment to lose. I, during that time, shall send for M. de Bussy."

"It is understood, monseigneur; but in case I do not find his Highness, what am I to do?"

"If you do not find his Highness, D'Aurilly, do not affect to look for him; it will suffice to tell him later on with what zeal I tried to see him. At all events, I shall be at the Louvre at a quarter before two."

D'Aurilly bowed to the duke and left.

Chicot saw him go out, and guessed the reason why. If M. le Duc de Guise should hear of M. d'Anjou's arrest, matters would become very complicated.

Chicot saw that D'Aurilly went up the Rue de la

Huchette to take the Pont Saint-Michel ; he, on the contrary, ran down the Rue Saint-André-des-Arts with all the speed of his long legs, and passed the Seine at the lower Nesle when D'Aurilly had hardly come in sight of the great Châtelet.

We shall therefore follow D'Aurilly, who conducts us to the very scene of the important events of that day.

He walked down the quay, thronged with *bourgeois* who all had a triumphal expression, and reached the Louvre, which seemed to him most quiet and innocent.

D'Aurilly knew the world and the court ; he talked first with the officer at the door, who is always an important personage in the eyes of those in quest of news and scandals.

The officer was all amiability ; the king had waked up in the very best of humors. From the officer, D'Aurilly passed on to the *concierge*, who was engaged in the inspection of an army of servants trying on new costumes and giving them halberds of a new design. He smiled on the lute-player and replied to his remarks on the weather, all of which gave D'Aurilly the very best opinion of the political atmosphere.

D'Aurilly consequently passed on, went up the grand staircase which led to the duke's apartments, bowing right and left to the courtiers already assembled in the passages. At the door he found Chicot, sitting on a stool playing chess, and apparently absorbed in the deepest meditation. D'Aurilly tried to pass, but Chicot with his long legs blocked up the doorway. He was forced to touch him on the shoulder.

“ Ah, is it you ? Pardon me, M. d'Aurilly.”

“ What are you doing, M. Chicot ? ”

“ Playing chess, as you see.”

“ All alone ? ”

“ Yes, I am studying a move. Do you play chess, monsieur ? ”

“ Very little.”

“ Yes, I know, you are a musician, and music is such

difficult art that those who cultivate it must give up to it all their time and intelligence."

" It seems that the move is an important one," said D'Aurilly, laughing.

" Yes, my king worries me. You must know, M. d'Aurilly, that at chess, the king is a very insignificant personage who has no will of his own, who can only go one step at a time, forward, backwards, right or left, while he is surrounded by very active enemies,—by knights who jump three squares at a time, and by a crowd of pawns who surround him, pursue him, and harass him,—so that if he is ill advised, he is a ruined king in no time ; now, M. d'Aurilly, my king is at present in a most perilous position."

" But, Monsieur Chicot, how does it happen that you are playing chess at the door of his Royal Highness's room ? "

" I am waiting for M. de Quélus, who is in there."

" Where ? " asked D'Aurilly.

" Why, there, with his Royal Highness."

" M. de Quélus with his Royal Highness ? " asked D'Aurilly, with surprise.

During this dialogue, Chicot had made room for the ute-player to pass, but in such a way that M. de Guise's messenger was now placed between him and the door. Yet D'Aurilly hesitated to open this door.

" What is M. de Quélus doing with the duke ? " he asked. " I did not know them to be such friends."

" Hush ! " said Chicot, in a most mysterious way ; and still holding his chess-board in both hands, he described a circle, which enabled his mouth to reach D'Aurilly's ear while his feet did not move. " He has come to ask the duke's pardon for a little quarrel they had yesterday."

" Really ? " asked D'Aurilly.

" The king insisted upon it. You know on what excellent terms the brothers are at present. The king would not suffer an impertinence from Quélus to pass unpunished, and ordered him to apologize."

" Truly ? "

" Ah, M. d'Aurilly, I think we are entering the golden age. The Louvre will become Arcadia, and the two brothers *Arcades ambo*. Ah, pardon me ! I always forget that you are a musician."

D'Aurilly smiled and passed into the ante-chamber. As he did so, he opened the door wide enough for Chicot to be able to exchange a significant glance with Quélus, who was probably forewarned.

Chicot pursued his combinations, scolding his monarch not more harshly than a real king would have deserved, but rather too severely for an innocent piece of ivory.

D'Aurilly, as he entered the ante-chamber, was courteously saluted by Quélus, in whose hands a superb ebony cup and ball, inlaid with ivory, was performing rapid evolutions.

" Bravo, M. de Quélus," said D'Aurilly, seeing the young man perform a difficult feat. " Bravo ! "

" Ah, my dear M. d'Aurilly," said Quélus, " when shall I play cup and ball as you play the lute ? "

" When you will have studied your plaything as many days as I have spent years studying my instrument," said D'Aurilly, a little piqued. " But where is Monseigneur ? Were you not with him ? "

" I have an audience with him, my dear D'Aurilly ; but Schomberg has precedence."

" Ah, M. de Schomberg too ! " said the musician, with increased surprise.

" Oh, *mon Dieu* ! yes. The king arranged all that ; he is there in the dining-room. Go in, M. d'Aurilly, and kindly remind the prince that we are waiting."

D'Aurilly opened the second door and perceived Schomberg sitting, or rather lying, on a kind of couch.

Schomberg, in this position, was amusing himself by shooting through a ring suspended from the ceiling little balls of perfumed earth, an ample provision of which he had in his pouch, while a favorite dog brought back those balls which were not broken against the wall.

" What ! " said D'Aurilly, " such an occupation as this ? Ah, M. de Schomberg ! "

"Ah, *guten Morgen!* M. d'Aurilly," said Schomberg, suddenly interrupting his game. "You see I am amusing myself while waiting for an audience."

"But where is Monseigneur?" asked D'Aurilly.

"Hush! Monseigneur is now busy, forgiving D'Epernon and Maugiron. But will you not enter,—you the privileged one?"

"It might, perhaps, be indiscreet."

"Not in the least; on the contrary, you will find him in the next room. Go in, M. d'Aurilly, go in," and he pushed D'Aurilly through the door.

The astonished musician now perceived D'Epernon standing before a mirror, stiffening his moustache with gum, while Maugiron, seated near the window, was busy cutting out images, by the side of which the bas-reliefs on the temple of Venus Aphrodite and the paintings of the bath of Tiberus, at Capræ, would have seemed holy.

The duke, without his sword, sat in his armchair between these two men, who looked at him only to watch his movements, and spoke only disagreeable words.

Seeing D'Aurilly, he rushed to meet him.

"Take care, monseigneur," said Maugiron, "you are stepping on my images!"

"*Mon Dieu!*" cried D'Aurilly, "what do I see? He insults my master."

"Ah, M. d'Aurilly," said D'Epernon, continuing to arrange his moustache, "how are you? Very well, I hope, but you seem a little flushed."

"Pray be so kind as to bring me your little dagger," said Maugiron.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen," said D'Aurilly, "have you forgotten where you are?"

"Not at all, my dear Orpheus," said D'Epernon; "this is why I ask for your dagger. You see that M. le Duc has none."

"D'Aurilly," cried the duke, in a tone full of grief and rage, "do you not understand that I am a prisoner?"

"Of whom?"

" Of my brother. Could you not know that, on seeing my jailers ? "

D'Aurilly uttered a cry of surprise.

" Oh, if I had only suspected it ! " he said.

" You would have brought your lute to amuse his Highness," said a mocking voice ; " but I thought of it, dear M. d'Aurilly. I sent for it, and here it is," and Chicot really handed the lute to the unfortunate musician. Behind Chicot, Quélus and Schomberg were yawning frightfully.

" How is your game of chess, Chicot ? " asked D'Epernon.

" Ah, yes, true ! " said Quélus.

" Gentlemen, I think I can save my king, but it will not be without difficulty. Come, M. d'Aurilly, give me your dagger in return for the lute,—a fair exchange."

The amazed musician obeyed, and seated himself at his master's feet.

" Here is one rat in the trap," said Quélus ; " let us pass on to the others."

At these words, which gave D'Aurilly the explanation of the preceding scenes, Quélus returned to his position in the ante-chamber, but he begged Schomberg to give him his blow-gun in exchange for the cup and ball.

" That is only fair," said Chicot, " we must vary our pleasures. For a change, I shall go and sign the League."

And he closed the door, leaving the poor lute-player in company with his Highness.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

HOW THE MASTER OF THE HOUNDS FOLLOWED THE WRONG SCENT

THE hour of the great reception had arrived, or rather was near at hand ; since noon the Louvre had already

received the principal chiefs, the interested parties, and even the lookers-on.

Paris was nearly as tumultuous as the day before, but with this difference,—that the Swiss, who had had no part in the fête of the previous evening, were now the principal actors. Paris had sent towards the Louvre its deputations of Leaguers, corporations of workmen, aldermen, militia, and ever increasing masses of spectators, who, on those days when the whole population was busy with something, came to look on as active and interested as if Paris had had two populations, as if in this great city, a little image of the world, each individual was divided into two parts, the one acting, and the other looking on.

The Louvre was therefore surrounded by a mass of populace ; but we need not tremble for the Louvre.

It was not yet the time when the murmur of the people, changed into thunder, rocked down with the breath of its cannon the walls of the master's castle. The Swiss, those ancestors of the 10th of August and the 27th of July, smiled on the masses of Parisians, though these masses were armed, and the Parisians smiled on the Swiss. The time had not yet come when the vestibule of the kings was the scene of bloodshed.

Let us not believe that the drama was less interesting for being less gloomy ; on the contrary, it was one of the most curious scenes ever presented in the old Louvre.

The king was in the great hall, seated on his throne, surrounded by his officers, his friends, his servants, and his family, waiting for all the corporations to file past him, and go to the places assigned to them in the court-yard, leaving their chiefs in the palace.

He could thus, at a single glance, count his enemies, prompted from time to time by Chicot, hidden behind the royal chair, warned by a sign from the queen-mother, or by some movement on the part of the minor Leaguers, who were more impatient than their chiefs, because they were less advanced in the secret. M. de Monsoreau entered abruptly.

"Look, Henriet," said Chicot.

"What do you want me to see?"

"Look at your master of the hounds, *pardieu!* he is well worthy of it. He is pale and muddy enough to deserve a good look."

"Yes," said the king, "it is indeed he."

Henri made a sign to M. de Monsoreau, who approached.

"How is it that you are at the Louvre, monsieur?" asked Henri. "I believed you to be at Vincennes."

"I had everything in readiness there at seven o'clock this morning; but when noon came, and I had no news, I feared that some misfortune might have happened to your Majesty, and I hurried back."

"Really?"

"Sire," said the count, "if I have failed in my duty, attribute it to an excess of zeal."

"Yes, monsieur," said Henri, "and be assured that I fully appreciate it."

"Now," continued the count, with hesitation, "if your Majesty demands that I should return to Vincennes, as I am quite reassured—"

"No, no, remain. This chase was a mere whim that passed through our head, and went as it came. Remain; I shall have need of all those who are devoted to me, and you have just placed yourself among those on whose devotion I can rely."

Monsoreau bowed.

"Where does your Majesty wish me to stand?" he asked.

"Will you give him to me for half an hour?" whispered Chicot to the king.

"What for?"

"To torment him a little. What do you care? You owe me some compensation for forcing me to be present at this tiresome ceremony."

"Well, take him."

"I had the honor of asking your Majesty where I am to stand," said the master of the hounds a second time.

"I thought I had answered ; wherever you like. Behind my chair, for instance ; there is where I generally place my friends."

"Come here," said Chicot, giving M. de Monsoreau a portion of the space he had reserved for himself ; "come and get the scent of these fellows. Here is game that can be tracked without a hound. *Ventre de biche !* Monsieur le Comte, what scent ! Here are the shoemakers who pass, or rather, who have passed ; and here are the anners,—*mort de ma vie !* if you lose the scent of these I will discharge you from your place ! "

M. de Monsoreau pretended to listen, or rather listened without hearing. He was very much preoccupied, and looked around with an anxiety which did not escape the king, particularly when Chicot drew his attention to it.

"Well," he whispered to the king, "do you know what our master of the hounds is now hunting ? "

"No."

"Your brother D'Anjou ! "

"At all events, he is not in sight," replied Henri, laughing.

"No. Do you wish him to remain in ignorance of his whereabouts ? "

"I should not be sorry to see him follow the wrong track."

"Wait, wait ! I am told that the wolf has the same bent as the fox ; he will make the mistake. Only ask him where the countess is."

"Why ? "

"Ask, and you will see."

"Monsieur le Comte," said Henri, "what have you done with Madame de Monsoreau ? I do not perceive her among the ladies."

The count shuddered, as if a serpent had bitten his foot. Chicot scratched his nose and winked at the king.

"Sire," replied the master of the hounds, "the countess is not well, and the air of Paris does not agree with her. She set out last night with her father, the comte de Méridor, after having taken leave of the queen."

" And towards what part of France did she travel ? " asked the king, delighted to have an opportunity of turning his head away while the tanners were passing.

" Towards her home in Anjou, sire."

" The fact is," said Chicot, gravely, " that the air of Paris is not good for women in her situation,—*gravidis uxoribus Lutetia inclemens*. I advise you to imitate the count's example, and to send the queen away when she will be—"

Monsoreau turned pale, and glared furiously at Chicot, who, leaning his elbow on the royal chair, and his chin on his hand, seemed to be looking very attentively at the passementerie makers as they passed.

" Who tells you, impertinent, that Madame de Monsoreau is *enceinte* ? " murmured Monsoreau.

" Is she not ? " said Chicot. " It would be more impertinent to suppose that, I think."

" She is not, monsieur."

" Well, well," said Chicot, " have you heard, Henri ? It seems that your master of the hounds has committed the same mistake as you,—he has forgotten to bring together the chemises of Notre-Dame."

Monsoreau clinched his fists and swallowed his rage after having shot at Chicot a glance of malicious hatred to which Chicot replied by pulling his hat over his eyes and shaking the long, slender plume which ornamented it.

The count saw that the moment was ill chosen, and shook his head as if to drive away the clouds from his brow. Chicot also changed his expression and assumed the most gracious smile.

" Poor countess," he said, " she is in danger of perishing of *ennui* on the way."

" I told the king," replied Monsoreau, " that she was travelling with her father."

" I do not deny that a father is very respectable, but not amusing. And if she had only that worthy baron to amuse her on the way— But luckily—"

" What ? " quickly asked the count.

" Why, what ? " replied Chicot.

" What do you mean by ' luckily ' ? "

" Ah, ah, you were making an ellipsis, Monsieur le Comte."

The count shrugged his shoulders.

" I beg your pardon, the interrogative form of which you made use is called an ' ellipsis.' Ask Henri, who is a philologist."

" Yes," said Henri ; " but what was the meaning of our adverb ? "

" Which adverb ? "

" ' Luckily.' "

" ' Luckily ' signifies ' luckily.' Luckily, I said (and in this I admire the goodness of God), there exist at this hour on the road some of our friends, and even very interesting ones, who, if they met the countess, would surely amuse her ; and," carelessly added Chicot, " as they are travelling along the same road, they will probably meet. Oh, I see them now ! Do you not, Henri,—you who are a man of imagination ? There they go, along a beautiful shady lane, on prancing horses, saying a thousand sweet things which greatly delight the dear lady ! "

This was a second dagger, sharper than the first, planted in M. de Monsoreau's breast ; but he could not now hide his rage. The king was there, and Chicot had in him a momentary ally ; therefore, with an affability which justified to the efforts he had made to curb his temper, he said,—

" What, you have friends travelling towards Anjou ? "

" You might even say *we* have, Monsieur le Comte, because these friends are more yours than mine."

" You astonish me, Monsieur Chicot," said the count. " I know no one, who— ? "

" That is right, be mysterious."

" I swear to you."

" Oh, you know they are there, Monsieur le Comte, and they are even such very dear friends that I saw you looking around for them from mere force of habit, though you know perfectly well that they are on the way to Anjou."

“ I ! ” said the count. “ You saw me ? ”

“ Yes, you, the master of the hounds, the palest of all present, past, and future, from Nimrod to M. d’Autefort, your predecessor.”

“ Monsieur Chicot ! ”

“ The palest, I repeat,—*veritas veritatem*. This is a barbarism, because there is only one truth ; for if there were two, one, at least, would not be true,—but you are not a philologist, my dear M. Esau.”

“ No, monsieur, I am not ; therefore I shall beg you to return at once to those friends of whom you spoke, and be kind enough to name them for me, if your super-abundant imagination will allow you to do so.”

“ Ah, you always repeat the same thing. Seek monsieur, *morbleu !* seek. It is your business to hunt animals,—witness that unfortunate deer whom you disturbed this morning, and who surely did not expect that from you. If some one were to prevent you from sleeping, would you like that ? ”

Monsoreau’s eyes wandered about in terror.

“ What ? ” he cried, seeing an empty seat near the king.

“ Come now ! ” said Chicot.

“ M. le Duc d’Anjou ! ” cried the master of the hounds

“ Tally-ho, tally-ho ! ” cried the Gascon, “ the game is started.”

“ He left to-day ! ” exclaimed the count.

“ He left to-day, but it is possible he may have left last night. You are not a philologist, monsieur, but ask the king, who is one. When did your brother disappear, Henriquet ? ”

“ Last night,” replied the king.

“ The duke gone ! ” murmured Monsoreau, pale and trembling. “ Ah, *mon Dieu ! mon Dieu !* what are you telling me, sire ? ”

“ I do not say that my brother is gone,” said the king. “ I only say that he disappeared last night, and that his best friends do not know where he is.”

“ Oh,” angrily cried the count, “ if I believed that—

" Well, well, what would you do ? Besides, where would be the harm if he made a few soft speeches to Madame de Monsoreau. Our friend François is the gay member of the family ; he was a beau in the reign of Charles IX., and he is now, under our king Henri III., who has other things to do besides making love. The devil ! there should be at least one prince at court who represents the French mind."

" The duke gone ! " repeated Monsoreau. " Are you quite sure, monsieur ? "

" And you ? " asked Chicot.

The master of the hounds looked once more towards the place usually occupied by the king's brother, and which continued unoccupied.

" I am lost ! " he murmured, with such a marked intention of escaping, that Chicot held him.

" Be quiet, *morbleu* ! You do nothing but move, and that nauseates the king. *Mort de ma vie* ! I should like to be in your wife's place, to see every day a prince with a louble nose, and to hear M. d'Aurilly, who plays the lute like the late lamented Orpheus. What luck your wife has ! "

Monsoreau shivered with anger.

" Gently, monsieur, " said Chicot ; " hide your joy. Here is the business beginning. It is indecent to show one's passions. Listen to the king's speech."

The master of the hounds was forced to keep his place, because the hall had become gradually filled ; he therefore remained motionless.

The whole assembly was present. M. de Guise had just entered, and bent his knee before the king, but not without an anxious glance at the Duc d'Anjou's vacant seat.

The king rose, the heralds commanded silence.

CHAPTER XLIX.

HOW THE KING APPOINTED A CHIEF FOR THE LEAGUE
WHO WAS NEITHER THE DUC D'ANJOU NOR THE DUC
DE GUISE.

“GENTLEMEN,” said the king, amid a profound silence, after assuring himself that D'Epernon, Schomberg, Maugiron, and Quélus had taken their places behind him, leaving their prisoner in the charge of ten Swiss guards. “a king, placed as he is between heaven and earth, hears equally well the voices from above and the voices from below,—that is to say, the commands of God and the commands of the people. I understand that this association of all the powers for the defence of the Catholic religion is a guarantee for my subjects; therefore I approve of the counsels given by my cousin Guise. I then declare the Holy League duly authorized and instituted; and as it is necessary that this great body should have a good and powerful head, that this chief who is called upon to maintain the Church should be one of the most zealous sons of the Church,—zealous from the very nature of his duties,—I choose a Christian prince for the head of the League, and declare that he shall henceforth be called—”

Henri purposely paused for an instant. The buzzing of a fly could have been heard amid the general stillness. Henri repeated,—

“He shall henceforth be called Henri de Valois, King of France and Poland.”

As he uttered these words, the king raised his voice with a sort of affectation, to mark his triumph, and to stimulate the enthusiasm of his friends, ready to burst forth, as well as to crush the Leaguers, whose half-suppressed murmurs betrayed their discontent, surprise, and fear.

As for the Duc de Guise, he was absolutely prostrated. Large drops of perspiration gathered on his brow. H

exchanged a glance with each of his two brothers, the Duc de Mayenne and the cardinal, who stood on either side of him. Monsoreau, more surprised than ever at the Duc d'Anjou's absence, was becoming reassured as he recalled the king's words. In fact, the duke might have disappeared without going away. The cardinal left the group with which he was standing and stole up to his brother.

"François," he whispered to him, "I fear we are no longer in safety here. Let us hasten to take leave, because the people are strange, and the king whom they abhorred will become their idol for a few days."

"Very well," said Mayenne, "let us go. Wait here or our brother while I prepare our retreat."

During that time, the king had signed the first act prepared on the table, and drawn up in advance by M. de Morvilliers, who, with the exception of the queen-mother, was the only person in the secret; then passing the pen to M. de Guise, he said, in that mocking tone which he knew so well how to assume,—

"Sign, my cousin;" then pointing with his finger to the place, "there, there, below me. Now pass it to Monsieur le Cardinal, and to M. le Duc de Mayenne."

But the Duc de Mayenne had already reached the foot of the steps, and the cardinal was in the other room. The king noticed their absence.

"Then pass it to the master of the hounds," he said.

The duke signed, handed the pen to Monsoreau, and made a motion to go.

"Wait," said the king.

And while Quélus took the pen from the hands of M. de Monsoreau,—and not only all the noblemen present, but all the chiefs of corporations assembled for his great event, signed their names on loose sheets which were to complete the registers used the day before,—the king was saying to the Duc de Guise,—

"Was it not your advice, my cousin, to guard our capital with a good army, composed of all the forces of the League? The army is formed, and properly formed,

since the natural general of the Parisians is the king."

"Certainly, sire," replied the duke, without well knowing what he said.

"But I do not forget," continued the king, "that I have another army to command, and that the command of this army belongs to the greatest general of the kingdom. While I command the League, you, my cousin, must go and command the army."

"And when do I set out?"

"At once," replied the king.

"Henri, Henri!" said Chicot, who, in obedience to the laws of etiquette, could not run after the king and stop him in the midst of his speech, as he had a great mind to do. But as the king had not heard him, or if he had, not understood him, he advanced respectfully, holding in his hand an enormous pen, and made his way to the king.

"Will you hush, double idiot!" he whispered; but it was too late. The king had already announced his nomination to the Duc de Guise, and handed him his commission signed in advance, and this in spite of all the Gascon's signs and grimaces.

The Duc de Guise took his brevet and left. The cardinal was waiting for him at the door of the room and the Duc de Mayenne was waiting for both at the palace gates.

They got into the saddle at once, and ten minutes had not elapsed before they had all three left Paris. The rest of the assembly gradually withdrew. Some cried "*Vive le roi!*" others cried "*Vive la Ligue!*"

"I have at least solved a great problem," said Henri, laughing.

"Ah, yes, you are a fine mathematician," said Chicot.

"No doubt," said the king. "By making these rascal utter two different cries, I succeed in making them cry the same thing."

"*Sta benè!*" said the queen-mother, pressing her son's hand.

" You believe that," said the Gascon. " She is furious; her beloved Guises are nearly crushed by the blow."

" Oh, sire, sire," cried the favorites, crowding around the king, " what a sublime imagination you have ! "

" They think money will rain on them like manna from heaven," whispered Chicot to the king.

Henri was escorted in triumph to his apartment, and amid the throng of courtiers, Chicot played the part of the slave of antiquity, as he pursued his master with his lamentations. This persistence on his part in recalling to the demi-god the fact that he was after all but a man, struck the king so forcibly that he dismissed every one and remained alone with Chicot.

" Now," said Henri, turning towards the Gascon, " do you know that you are never pleased, Maître Chicot, and that becomes a bore. The devil ! I do not ask for complaisance, but for common sense."

" You are right, Henri," said Chicot, " that is what you need the most."

" At least admit that it was cleverly done."

" That is exactly what I cannot admit."

" Ah, you are jealous, M. le Roi de France ! "

" I ? Heaven forbid ! I would make a better choice of subjects."

" Corbleu ! "

" Oh, what ferocious pride ! "

" Come, am I, or not, king of the League ? "

" Why, you are, unquestionably. But—"

" But what ? "

" But you are no longer King of France."

" And who is King of France ? "

" Everybody except you, Henri ; to begin with, your brother."

" My brother ! Of whom are you speaking ? "

" Of M. d'Anjou, *parbleu !*"

" Who is my prisoner."

" Yes, but prisoner though he is, he is anointed, and you are not."

" By whom was he anointed ? "

“ By the Cardinal de Guise. Really, Henri, I advise you to speak of your police. A king is crowned here in Paris at the Abbey of Sainte-Genevieve, before thirty-three persons and you do not even know it.”

“ And you know it, perhaps ? ”

“ Certainly, I do.”

“ And how can you know what I do not ? ”

“ Because M. de Morvilliers manages your police, and I attend to my own.”

The king frowned.

“ As kings of France, we already have, besides Henri de Valois, François d’Anjou ; and then,” said Chicot, pretending to search in his mind, “ we also have the Duc de Guise.”

“ The Duc de Guise ? ”

“ The Duc de Guise, Henri le Balafré, Henri de Guise. I repeat : we have also the Duc de Guise.”

“ A fine king, whom I exile, and send to the army.”

“ Well, were you not exiled to Poland ? Is it not nearer from La Charité to the Louvre, than from Cracow to Paris ? Ah, yes, you send him to the army, and this is the cleverness of the stroke : you send him to the army, and you put thirty thousand men under his orders,—*ventre de biche !* and what an army ! A real army,—not like your army of the League ; no, no, an army of *bourgeois* is good enough for Henri de Valois, king of the favorites. Henri de Guise must have an army of soldiers ; and what soldiers ! Tried veterans, loving the smell of powder, and capable of destroying twenty armies of the League ; so that if, being king in fact, Henri de Guise should one day wish to become king in name, he will only have to turn towards the capital, and say, ‘ Forward ! Let us swallow Paris, Henri de Valois, and the Louvre at one mouthful ! ’ and the rogues would do it. I know them.”

“ You forget one thing in your argument, illustrious politician,” said Henri.

“ Ah, that may be, if you mean a fourth king.”

“ No,” said Henri, with supreme disdain, “ you forget

that to reign in France when a Valois wears the crown, it is necessary to look back a little, and to count one's ancestors. That M. d'Anjou should have such an idea, I understand. He may lay claim to it ; his ancestors are mine, and the rights would be equal as between us ; there is only a question of primogeniture. But M. de Guise—Come now, Master Chicot, go and study heraldry, and tell me if the lilies of France are not better than the merlets of Lorraine."

" Ah," said Chicot, " that is where you make a mistake."

" Where is the mistake ? "

" Why, M. de Guise is of far better nobility than you believe."

" Better than mine, perhaps," said Henri, with a smile.

" There is no ' perhaps,' my little Henriet."

" You are mad, Monsieur Chicot ; I say absolutely mad. Go and learn how to read, my friend."

" Well, Henri, you who already know, and who have no need to go back to school like me, read this a little." And Chicot drew from his bosom the parchment on which Nicolas David had written the genealogy that we know,—the same which had come back from Avignon, approved by the Pope, and which made Henri de Guise descend from Charlemagne.

Henri turned pale after he had glanced at the parchment, and recognized near the legate's signature, the seal of Saint Peter.

" What do you say to that ? " asked Chicot. " The lilies are left a little behind, eh ? *Ventre de biche !* the merlets seem ready to fly as high as Cæsar's eagles. Take care, my son ! "

" But by what means did you obtain possession of this genealogy ? "

" Do I think of such things ? It came to me of its own accord."

" But where was it before it came to you ? "

" Beneath the bolster of a lawyer ! "

“ And what was the name of this lawyer ? ”

“ Maître Nicolas David.”

“ Where was he ? ”

“ At Lyons.”

“ And who went to Lyons to take it from beneath that lawyer’s bolster ? ”

“ One of my good friends.”

“ What does he do ? ”

“ He preaches.”

“ So he is a monk ? ”

“ Exactly.”

“ And his name is—”

“ Gorenflot.”

“ What ! ” cried Henri, “ that abominable Leaguer who made an incendiary speech at Sainte-Genevieve’s, and who insulted me last night in the streets of Paris ? ”

“ Do you remember the story of Brutus, who pretended to be mad ? ”

“ Then your friend is a deep politician.”

“ Have you heard of M. Machiavelli, secretary of the Republic of Florence ? Your grandmother was his pupil.”

“ Then he took this document from the lawyer ? ”

“ Yes, by main force.”

“ From Nicolas David, that assassin ? ”

“ From Nicolas David, that assassin.”

“ Is your monk brave ? ”

“ As brave as Bayard.”

“ And having done this, he has not yet come to me for his reward ? ”

“ He has humbly withdrawn to his convent, and asks but the thing,—that it may be forgotten that he ever left it.”

“ Then he is modest ? ”

“ As Saint Crepin.”

“ Chicot, upon my word as a gentleman, your friend shall have the first vacant abbey,” said the king.

“ Thank you for him, Henri. *Ma foi !* ” said Chicot.

to himself, " here he is between Mayenne and Valois,—between a rope and a reward. Will he be hanged ? Will he be abbot ? He who can tell me must be clever. At all events, if he is still asleep, he must have curious dreams."

CHAPTER L.

ETEOCLES AND POLYNICES.

THIS day of the League ended as noisily and brilliantly as it had begun. The king's friends rejoiced ; the preachers of the League were preparing to canonize Brother Henri, and spoke, as had been done for Saint Mauritius, of the warlike deeds of the Valois who had so distinguished himself in his youth.

The favorites said, " The lion has at last waked up ; " the Leaguers, " The fox smelt the trap." And as the character of the French nation is chiefly made up of pride, and as Frenchmen do not like chiefs of inferior intelligence, the conspirators themselves rejoiced in having been outwitted by their king. It is true that the principal ones had placed themselves beyond reach. The three Lorraine princes had galloped away from Paris, and their principal agent, M. de Monsoreau, was about to leave the Louvre and make preparations for departure, in the hope of overtaking the Duc d'Anjou ; but just as he passed the threshold, Chicot approached him.

The Leaguers had all left the palace, and the Gascon no longer feared anything for his king.

" Whither are you going in such haste, monsieur ? " he asked.

" To his Highness," laconically replied the count.

" To his Highness ? "

" Yes, I am anxious about Monseigneur. We do not live in a time when princes may set out on a journey without a good escort."

" Oh, that one is so brave that he is foolhardy," said Chicot.

The master of the hounds looked at the Gascon.

"At all events, if you are anxious about him," said the latter, "I am even more so."

"About whom?"

"His Highness."

"Why?"

"Do you not know what is said?"

"Do they not say he is gone?" asked the count.

"They say he is dead," whispered the Gascon.

"Pshaw!" said Monsoreau, in a tone of surprise which was not free from a certain joy, "you said he was travelling."

"Well, I had been persuaded of the fact,—I am so credulous that I believe all the tales I hear; but now, you see, I have every reason to believe that if he is travelling, it is to the next world, poor prince!"

"What gives you these funereal ideas?"

"He entered the Louvre yesterday, did he not?"

"No doubt, since I entered with him."

"Well, no one has seen him come out."

"From the Louvre?"

"No."

"But D'Aurilly?"

"Disappeared."

"But his attendants?"

"Disappeared, disappeared, disappeared."

"Is this a jest, Monsieur Chicot?" asked the master of the hounds.

"Ask."

"Whom?"

"The king."

"His Majesty may not be questioned."

"Pshaw! if you do it the right way."

"Come," said the count, "I cannot remain thus in doubt."

And leaving Chicot, or rather going before him, he went towards the king's room. His Majesty had just left it.

"Where is the king?" asked the master of the hounds, "I must report to him about some orders he gave me."

"With M. le Duc d'Anjou," replied the one to whom he spoke.

"With M. le Duc d'Anjou," said the count to Chicot ; "then the prince is not dead."

"Oh," said the Gascon, "I fear his case is not much better."

After this, M. de Monsoreau became thoroughly bewildered ; it was certain that M. d'Anjou had never left the Louvre. Certain reports which reached him convinced him of the fact. Now, as he was ignorant of the real causes of the duke's absence, this absence, at such a moment, greatly surprised him.

The king was in fact in M. d'Anjou's room ; but as the master of the hounds, notwithstanding the greatness of his desire, could not go there too, he was forced to stand in the corridor and wait for news.

We have already said that in order to be present at the ceremony, the four favorites had left some Swiss guards in their stead ; but no sooner was it over than they hastened back, notwithstanding the great *ennui* caused by this occupation, so great was their desire to be disagreeable to the prince, and announce to him the triumph obtained by the king. Schomberg and D'Epernon were in the drawing-room, Quélus and Maugiron in the room with his Highness. François, on his part, was weary of his confinement as well as anxious, and it must be said that the conversation of these gentlemen was not of a nature to amuse him.

"You see," said Quélus from one end of the room to Maugiron at the other, as if the duke were not present,— "you see, Maugiron, it is only within the last hour that I have been able to appreciate our friend Valois ; he is really a great politician."

"Explain yourself," said Maugiron, sprawling on a lounge.

"The king spoke aloud of the conspiracy, therefore he no longer fears it ; so long as he did, he kept it quiet."

"That is logic," replied Maugiron.

"If he no longer fears it, he will punish it. You know

Valois ; he surely shines with a great number of qualities, but his resplendent person is rather obscure when it comes to clemency."

" Agreed."

" Now, if he punish the said conspiracy, there will be a trial ; if there be one, we shall enjoy a second performance like the affair of Amboise, and that without moving."

" A fine sight, *morbleu !*"

" Yes, and in which all our places will be marked in advance unless—"

" Unless what ? "

" Unless—which is very possible—they should put aside all judicial formalities on account of the position of the accused, and settle the matter quietly."

" That is my opinion," said Maugiron. " Family affairs are usually settled in this way ; and this last conspiracy is a real family affair."

D'Aurilly exchanged an anxious glance with the prince.

" Faith ! " said Maugiron, " I know one thing : in the king's place, I would not spare the high heads. Really, these gentlemen are twice as guilty as others when they plot ; they think that everything is permissible. I would shorten one or two and drown the small fry. The Seine is deep before Nesle ; and, upon my word, in the king's place, I would not resist the temptation."

" In that case," said Quélus, " I do not think it would be safe to revive the famous invention of the sacks."

" What was that ? " asked Maugiron.

" A royal fancy, which dates from the year 1350 or thereabouts : they tied a man in a sack in company with three or four cats and threw the whole thing into the water. Cats cannot bear water, and the minute they felt it they attacked the man ; then took place things which, unfortunately, no one was able to see."

" Really," said Maugiron, " you are a mine of information, Quélus, and your conversation is most interesting."

" This invention could not be applied to the chiefs,

because they always have the right to demand decapitation on a public square or assassination in some corner. But as you said, for the small fry, and by small fry I mean the favorites, squires, butlers, lute-players—”

“ Gentlemen ! ” stammered D’Aurilly, pale with terror.

“ Do not answer, D’Aurilly,” said François ; “ this cannot apply to me or my followers. Princes of the blood are not a subject for jesting in France.”

“ No, they are treated more seriously,” said Quélus ; “ they are beheaded. Louis XI. did not hesitate, witness M. de Nemours.”

The favorites had reached this point of their dialogue when a noise was heard ; the door opened and the king appeared on the threshold. François rose.

“ Sire,” he cried, “ I appeal to your judgment against the unworthy treatment I suffer at the hands of your followers ! ”

But Henri seemed to have neither seen nor heard his brother.

“ Good-morning, Quélus,” he said, kissing his favorite on both cheeks. “ Good-morning, my child, your very sight gladdens my soul ; and you, my poor Maugiron, how are you ? ”

“ Bored to death ! ” said Maugiron. “ When I consented to guard your brother, sire, I thought he would be more amusing. Fie ! the tiresome prince ; can he be the son of your father and mother ? ”

“ Sire, you hear him,” said François. “ Is it your royal wish that your brother should be insulted ? ”

“ Silence, monsieur,” said Henri, without even turning round. “ I do not like to hear prisoners complain.”

“ Prisoner as much as you please, but this prisoner is none the less your—”

“ The title which you invoke is fatal to you. A guilty brother is doubly guilty.”

“ But if he were not ? ”

“ He is.”

“ Of what crime ? ”

“ Of having incurred my displeasure.”

“Sire,” said François, humiliated, “do we need witnesses for our family quarrels?”

“You are right, monsieur. Leave me, my friends; I wish to be alone with my brother.”

“Sire,” whispered Quélus, “it is not prudent for your Majesty to remain with two enemies.”

“I shall take away D’Aurilly,” whispered Maugiron, on the other side.

The two gentlemen led away D’Aurilly, who was burning with curiosity and at the same time dying with uneasiness.

“We are now alone,” said the king.

“I was impatiently awaiting this moment, sire.”

“So was I! Ah, you wished to have my crown, worthy Eteocles; you used the League as a means to attain this end. You had yourself quietly anointed in a corner of Paris to show yourself some day to the Parisians, all shining with holy oil.”

“Alas!” said François, who felt the king’s anger gradually rising, “your Majesty does not allow me to speak.”

“What for?” asked Henri,—“to let you lie, or tell me things that I know as well as you do. But no, you would lie, brother; because if you confessed those things that you have done, you would be confessing that you deserve death. You would deserve it. I shall therefore spare you this shame.”

“Brother,” said François, “is it your intention to overwhelm me with insults?”

“Well, if what I say may be considered an insult, then it is I who speak falsely. Come, speak, I shall listen; let us know that you are not disloyal, and what is worse, a blunderer.”

“I do not know what your Majesty means. You speak in riddles.”

“Then I will explain my words,” cried Henri, in a voice filled with menaces, which rang in François’ ears. “You have plotted against me as you formerly plotted against my brother, Charles IX., only what you formerly did with

the aid of the King of Navarre, you do now with that of the Duc de Guise. Yours is a fine project, which I admire, and which would have given you a high place in the history of usurpers. It is true that formerly you crawled like a snake, and now you wish to bite like a lion. After perfidy, open force ; after the poison, the sword."

"Poison ! What do you mean, monsieur ?" cried François, pale with anger, and like the Eteocles to whom Henri had compared him, seeking a place where the flash from his eyes could strike his brother, "What poison ?"

"The poison with which you assassinated our brother, Charles IX. ; the poison which you destined for Henri le Navarre, your associate. That fatal poison is known ; our mother has so often made use of it. That may be why you gave it up for me ; that is why you wished to play the part of a general in taking the command of the League. But look me in the face, François," continued Henri, taking one step nearer his brother, "and be convinced that a man of my stamp will never be killed by a man like you."

François staggered beneath this terrible attack, but without any consideration of pity for his prisoner Henri resumed,—

"The sword ! the sword ! I should like to see you in this room alone with me, and holding a sword. I have already circumvented you in cunning, François, for I too took unfair means to reach the throne of France ; but these means were necessary to outwit one million of Poles. If you wish to be wily, be so in this manner ; if you wish to imitate me do so, but do not belittle me. Those are royal intrigues, those are stratagems worthy of a general. I therefore repeat it, in stratagem you have been outwitted, and in a loyal combat you would be killed ; therefore no longer attempt to struggle either in one way or the other. Henceforth I shall act as king, as master, as despot ; I shall watch you in your oscillations, pursue you in the darkness, and at the slightest doubt, at the slightest hesitation, I shall lay my hand on you and throw you to the axe of my executioner. This is what I

had to tell you about family affairs, why I wished to speak with you alone, and why I shall order my friends to leave you alone to-night that you may reflect in solitude on my words. If night really brings good counsel, it must most particularly do so to prisoners."

"Therefore," murmured the duke, "for a mere whim for a suspicion that looks like nightmare, I have fallen into disgrace with your Majesty."

"Better still, François; you have fallen beneath my justice!"

"But at least, sire, fix a term to my captivity, that I may know what to expect."

"When you will hear your sentence read, you will know."

"But my mother,—shall I not see my mother?"

"Why so? There are in the world only three copies of the famous hunting-book which my poor brother Charles devoured,—that is the word for it; and of the others, one is in Florence and the other in London. Besides, I am not a Nimrod like my poor brother. Adieu François."

The prince dropped on his chair.

"Gentlemen," said the king, opening the door, "M. le Duc d'Anjou has asked my permission to reflect to-night on the answer he is to give me in the morning. You will therefore leave him alone in his room, except for occasional visits of precaution. You may perhaps find your prisoner a little excited by the conversation we have just had together. Remember that in conspiring against me M. le Duc d'Anjou has renounced his title of brother; consequently you see before you only a captive who needs no ceremonies. If he should give you any trouble, warn me. I have the Bastille near at hand, and in the Bastille M. Laurent Testu, the best man in the world for calming rebellious moods."

"Sire, sire!" murmured François, making a last effort, "remember that I am your—"

"You were also the brother of Charles IX., I believe said Henri.

" Let me at least have my attendants, my friends."

" I advise you to complain ! Am I not depriving myself of mine for your sake ? " and Henri closed the door in the face of his brother, who staggered to an armchair, on which he sank.

CHAPTER LI.

HOW ONE DOES NOT ALWAYS LOSE TIME IN SEARCHING IN EMPTY CUPBOARDS.

THE scene which the Duc d'Anjou had just had with the king, led him to consider his position as desperate. The favorites had not left him in ignorance of all the events which had taken place at the Louvre ; they had showed him the defeat of MM. de Guise and Henri's triumph greater than they really were. He had heard the voice of the people crying a thing which seemed at first utterly incomprehensible to him,—*vive le roi !* and *vive la Ligue !* He had felt abandoned by the principal chiefs, who also found it necessary to save themselves.

Abandoned by his family, which had been reduced by poisonings and assassinations, divided by rancor and discord, he sighed as he looked back on this past which the king's words had recalled to him, and he thought that in his struggle against Charles IX. he had for confidants, or rather for dupes, those two devoted swords, those two flaming swords called Coconnas and La Mole.

The regret of certain lost advantages is the remorse of many souls. For the first time in his life, when he felt lonely and isolated, M. d'Anjou felt a sort of remorse for having sacrificed La Mole and Coconnas. In those days his sister Marguerite loved him and consoled him. How had he rewarded her ? There was his mother, Queen Catherine ; but she had never loved him. She had only used him as a tool, as he made use of others, and François had himself justice.

Once in the hands of his mother, he felt that he was no more his own master than the ship in mid-ocean when a storm is raging.

He remembered that even recently he had had at his side a sword well worth all the others ; and Bussy, the brave Bussy, returned to his memory.

Ah, this time François' feelings resembled remorse because he had offended him to please Monsoreau ; he had wished to please Monsoreau because the count knew his secret, and all at once this dangerous secret reached the ears of the king so that Monsoreau was no longer to be feared. He had therefore uselessly quarrelled with Bussy, which, according to a great politician, was worse than a crime,—it was a fault.

Now, what an advantage it would have been for the prince to know that Bussy, grateful and consequently faithful, was watching over him,—Bussy, the invincible the loyal hearted, the favorite of all ; Bussy watching over him meant probable liberty and sure vengeance.

But as we have said, Bussy, wounded to the heart sulked, and had retired to his tent, so that the prince remained with fifty feet of wall on the one side, and four favorites guarding the corridor on the other, without counting the courts filled with Swiss and soldiers.

From time to time, he returned to the window and measured the distance to the ground ; but such a height would have made the bravest man hesitate, and M^{me} d'Anjou was far from being proof against vertigo.

Besides this, every hour one of the prince's guardians either Schomberg or Maugiron, D'Epernon or Quélus entered, and without concerning himself about the duke's presence, sometimes without even saluting him, went the rounds, opening the doors and windows, inspecting the drawers and chests looking under the beds and tables even ascertaining that the curtains were in their place and that the sheets were not cut into strips.

From time to time, they leaned out and looked down and the height of forty-five feet reassured them.

“ Faith ! ” said Maugiron, as he returned from h

inspection, "I give it up; I beg leave to remain in this room, where our friends can see us during the day, and not to wake up every four hours to pay a visit to M. le Duc d'Anjou."

"Of course," said D'Epernon, "we behave like children. It is easy to see that all our lives we have been officers and never soldiers; we really do not know how to obey an order."

"How so?" asked Quélus.

"Why, what does the king wish, that we should guard the duke but not look at him?"

"All the more," said Maugiron, "that he is good to guard but not good to look at."

"Very good," said Schomberg; "but we must not think of relaxing our discipline, because the devil is wily."

"True," said D'Epernon, "but it is not sufficient to be wily to pass over the bodies of four men like us."

And D'Epernon drew himself up as he twirled his moustache.

"He is right," said Quélus.

"Well," said Schomberg, "do you believe M. le Duc d'Anjou to be such a fool as to try to escape precisely through our gallery? If he wishes to escape, he will make a hole in the wall."

"With what? He has no weapons."

"He has the windows," timidly said Schomberg, who remembered that he himself had measured the distance.

"Ah, the windows! Upon my word, that is charming!" cried D'Epernon. "Bravo, Schomberg! The windows! that means that you would jump down forty-five feet?"

"I confess that forty-five feet—"

"Well, he who is lame, heavy, cowardly as—"

"You," said Schomberg.

"My dear fellow," said D'Epernon, "you know that I am only afraid of phantoms; that is a question of nerves."

"That is because all those he has killed in duel appeared to him one night," gravely said Quélus.

"Let us not laugh," said Maugiron. "I have heard of a number of miraculous escapes,—with sheets, for instance."

"Ah, as for that, Maugiron's remark is most sensible," said D'Epernon. "I saw at Bordeaux a prisoner who had escaped with the sheets."

"You see!" said Schomberg.

"Yes," resumed D'Epernon, "but his back was broken and his head open ; his sheet had happened to be thirty feet too short. He had been obliged to jump, so the evasion was complete,—his body had escaped from prison, and his soul had escaped from his body."

"Well, besides, if he should escape," said Quélus, "that will give us an opportunity to hunt him. We shall pursue him, track him ; and as we do so, we shall try to break something of his, quite accidentally."

"Well, *mordieu*! we shall resume our true characters," cried Maugiron, "we are hunters, not jailers."

This decision seemed final, and they talked of something else, though they concluded that from hour to hour they would continue to visit the Duc d'Anjou.

The favorites were perfectly right in their supposition that the Duc d'Anjou would never attempt to make his escape by force, while, on the other hand, he would never attempt anything difficult or perilous. Not that the worthy prince lacked imagination ; and we must say that his imagination was given up to a furious work, as he paced the distance from his bed to the famous closet occupied during three nights by La Mole when Marguerite had sheltered him on the night of Saint-Bartholomew.

From time to time the prince's pale face was seen near the window overlooking the ditch of the Louvre. Beyond the ditch was an open space about fifteen feet broad, and then rolled the Seine, gleaming in the darkness and smooth as a mirror. On the other side, a giant rose, immovable in the shadow ; it was the Tour de Nesle.

The Duc d'Anjou, with the true interest of the prisoner had observed the sunset in all its phases ; he had followed the decline of light and the increase of darkness. He had

contemplated the beautiful sight of old Paris, whose roofs were, within the space of one hour, gilded by the last rays of the sun, and silvered by the first beams of the moon ; then he was gradually seized with a great terror at seeing immense clouds roll over the sky, heralding a storm for that night. Among other weaknesses, the Duc d'Anjou was afraid of thunder, and he would have given a great deal to have his guardians in the room with him, even if they did insult him. Yet he could not call them ; that would have showed his weakness too plainly.

He tried to throw himself on his bed, but found it impossible to sleep ; he tried to read, but the letters danced before his eyes like black devils ; he drank, but the wine had a bitter taste ; he touched with his fingers D'Aurilly's lute, suspended to the wall, but he felt that the vibrations of the chords affected his nerves in such a way that he was tempted to weep.

Then he began to swear like a trooper, and break everything he could lay his hands on.

This was a little family failing to which the inhabitants of the Louvre were accustomed. The favorites opened the door to see the meaning of the noise ; then having ascertained that the prince was only amusing himself, they had closed the door, which had increased the prisoner's anger.

He had just broken a chair, when an unmistakable sound, a crashing noise near the window was heard, and at the same moment he felt a rather sharp blow on his thigh. His first idea was that he had been wounded by a musket-shot, fired by one of the king's emissaries.

" Ah, traitor ! ah, coward ! " cried the prisoner, " you are having me shot, as you promised. Ah, I am dead ! " and he fell on the carpet. But as he fell, his hand came in contact with a hard, uneven object, much larger than a bullet.

" Oh, a stone ! " he said. " It must be a falconet, but I heard no explosion ; " at the same time he extended his leg, and though he felt a pain, there was nothing broken. He picked up the stone, and examined the

window-pane. The missile had been thrown with such force that it had made a hole without shivering the glass. It was wrapped up in a piece of paper.

Then the duke's ideas began to change. Might not this stone come from a friend as well as an enemy?

A cold perspiration gathered on his brow ; hope, as well as terror, has its anguish.

The duke went to the light. Around the stone was a piece of paper, carefully tied with silk. The paper had naturally softened the shock of the hard substance, which would otherwise have caused the prince even greater pain.

Breaking the silk, unrolling the paper, and reading it was the affair of a second ; he was completely revived.

“A letter !” he murmured, glancing around, and he read :

“Are you weary of confinement ? Do you like fresh air and liberty ? Enter the closet where the Queen of Navarre hid your poor friend M. de la Mole, open the cupboard, and if you raise the lower shelf, you will find a double bottom ; in this double bottom there is a rope ladder. Fasten it yourself to your balcony, and two strong arms will hold it from below. A horse, swift as thought, will carry you to a place of safety.

A FRIEND.”

“A friend !” cried the prince, “a friend ! Oh, I did not know I had a friend. Who is this friend who thinks of me ?”

And the duke reflected for a moment. Not knowing of whom to place his suspicions, he ran to the window, but he saw no one.

“Can it be a snare ?” murmured the prince, in whom fear was always the first feeling aroused. “But first, he added, “I must ascertain if the cupboard has a double bottom, and if there is a ladder.”

The duke, without changing the position of the light, resolved to trust to the testimony of his hands, went towards the closet, the door of which he had so often opened with a beating heart when he expected to find

there the Queen of Navarre, radiant with that beauty which François appreciated more than was befitting in a brother.

This time the duke's heart was beating violently. He groped his way to the cupboard, explored all the shelves, and having reached the lower one, after having weighed on the front and back, he pressed on one of the sides, and felt the board give way. He immediately put his hand in the cavity and felt the contact of the silk ladder.

Like a robber carrying off prey, the duke fled to his room with his treasure. Ten o'clock struck, and the duke immediately remembered that the inspection of his jailers took place every hour ; he therefore hid the ladder beneath the cushion of a chair, and sat on it. It was so artistically woven that it held perfectly in the narrow space where the prince had placed it. In fact, five minutes had not lapsed before Maugiron appeared in his dressing-gown, holding a drawn sword under his left arm and a candlestick in his right hand. As he entered the duke's room, he continued conversing with his friends outside.

"The bear is furious," said a voice. "He was breaking everything a moment ago ; take care he does not eat you up, Maugiron."

"Insolent !" murmured the duke.

"I believe your Highness did me the honor to speak to me," said Maugiron, with his most impudent manner.

The duke was about to retort, when he reflected that a quarrel would bring about a loss of time, and might perhaps make him lose his chance of escape. He swallowed his anger, and turned his chair around so as to present his back to the young man.

Maugiron, following the established custom, approached the bed to examine the sheets, and the windows to ascertain the presence of the curtains. He saw a broken pane, but he thought the duke himself had smashed it in his anger.

"Oh, Maugiron," cried Schomberg, "are you eaten up that you do not utter a sound ? In that case breathe just a sigh, that I may know I should avenge you."

The duke was impatiently cracking his fingers.

"Not at all," said Maugiron; "on the contrary, my bear is very gentle and quite tame."

The duke smiled to himself in the shadow. As for Maugiron, without even saluting the prince, which was the least he might do for one of such lofty birth, he went out, and as he did so locked the door. The prince let him do it, and when the key had ceased to turn,—

"Gentlemen," he murmured, "take care! a bear is a very cunning animal."

CHAPTER LII.

VENTRE ! SAINT-GRIS !

LEFT alone, the Duc d'Anjou, knowing that he had at least an hour before him, drew out his ladder, unrolled it, and examined every knot most carefully.

"The ladder is good," he said; "and so far as that goes, it is not offered to me as a means to break my bones."

Then he unrolled it all, and counted thirty-eight rounds, fifteen inches apart.

"Well, the length is sufficient," he thought; "there is nothing to fear on that score." He paused for a moment.

"Ah, I know now!" he said. "Those cursed favorites have sent me this ladder. I shall tie it to the balcony and while I go down they will come and cut the strings. That is the snare."

Then he thought again.

"No, this is not possible. They are not foolish enough to believe that I will go down without barricading the door; and that being done, they will calculate that I would have time to escape before they break it open. I shall do that," he said, as he looked around; "I shall certainly do that if I make up my mind to flee. Yet how can I believe in the innocence of this ladder found in my sister Marguerite's closet? Who in the world, beside

the Queen of Navarre, can know of the existence of this ladder ? Come," he repeated, " who is the friend ? The note is signed, ' A friend.' Who is this friend who knows so well the contents of the wardrobes in my apartment or that of my sister ? "

The duke had hardly concluded this argument, which seemed final, and was reading over the note to recognize if possible the handwriting, when a sudden idea flashed through his mind:

" Bussy ! " he cried. Bussy, whom so many women loved ; who seemed a hero to the Queen of Navarre to such a point that in her Memoirs she confesses of having creamed with terror every time he fought a duel ; Bussy, discreet, versed in the science of the closets, and in all probability the only one of his friends on whom he could rely,—was it not Bussy who had sent the note ? Here the duke's perplexity increased. Everything combined to make him believe that the note came from Bussy. The duke did not know all Bussy's reasons for being angry with him, as he was ignorant of his love for Diane de Méridor. It is true that he suspected it a little. As he himself had loved Diane, he could understand how difficult it was for Bussy to see that beautiful young woman without loving her ; but this slight suspicion vanished before the probabilities. Bussy's loyalty would not have allowed him to remain idle while his master was chained up ; he had been attracted by the adventurous spirit of this expedition. He had wished to revenge himself on the duke by restoring him to freedom. He had no more doubts ; it was Bussy who had written and who was waiting for him.

The prince again approached the window. He saw through the mist that rose from the river three oblong shadows which must be the horses, and two sorts of posts standing on the bank ; these must be two men. Two men, that was right,—Bussy and his faithful Le Haudoin.

" The temptation is strong," said the duke ; " and if it a snare, it is too clever for me to suspect it."

François then looked through the keyhole and saw his

four guardians. Two were asleep, and the other two had inherited Chicot's chessboard and were playing a game. He extinguished his light. Then he opened his window and leaned out from his balcony. The abyss, as he measured it with his glance, seemed more terrible in the darkness. He drew back, but air and space have such an irresistible attraction for a prisoner that François fancied he was being stifled when he re-entered his room. This feeling was so strong that something like disgust of life and indifference to death flashed through his mind.

The prince was astonished, and imagined that courage had returned to him; so, taking advantage of this moment of exaltation, he seized the ladder and fastened it to the balcony by the iron hooks which were on one end; then he returned to the door, which he barricaded the best way he could, persuaded that to upset the obstacles he had placed they would be forced to lose ten minutes,—that is to say, more time than he would need to reach the end of his ladder. After this he went back to the window.

He tried to see the men and horses, but nothing was in sight.

"I would like that even better," he murmured. "To flee alone is better than to flee with one's best friend,—particularly with an unknown friend."

At this moment the darkness was complete, and the first sounds of the approaching storm could now be heard. A great cloud, fringed with silver, extended like a recumbent elephant from one side to the other of the river, its body leaning against the palace, its trunk extending indefinitely beyond the Tour de Nesle.

A flash of lightning illuminated for one instant the immense cloud, and the prince fancied he saw in the ditch below those whom he sought on the bank. A horse neighed: there was no more doubt; he was expected. The duke shook the ladder to see that it was firmly fastened; then he stepped over the balcony and placed his foot on the first rung. Nothing could render the terrible anguish of the prisoner placed between a fragile silk cord and the deadly threats of his brother.

But scarcely had he placed his foot on the first wooden rung when it seemed that the ladder, instead of shaking as he might have expected, stiffened, and the second rung found itself under his foot without performing that movement of rotation which would have been very natural in this case.

Was it a friend or an enemy who held the bottom of the ladder? Would he be received below with open arms or with weapons? François was seized with an irresistible terror; he still held the balcony with his left hand and made a motion to return. One might have thought that the unseen person who awaited the prince at the foot of the wall could guess all that was taking place in his heart, because at that moment a little undulation, very gentle and even, a sort of solicitation of the cord, came up to his foot.

"They are holding the ladder from below," he said; "they do not wish me to fall. Come, a little courage," and he continued his descent. The two sides of the ladder were as stiff as poles. François observed that they carefully pulled the ladder from the wall to facilitate his descent.

He therefore dropped down like an arrow, sacrificing in rapid descent the lining of his cloak. All at once, instead of touching the ground, which he instinctively felt to be near his feet, he was caught in the arms of a man who whispered into his ear these three words,—

"You are saved."

He was then carried to the edge of the ditch, and ushered up a narrow path; he finally reached the top of the bank. On the bank was a second man, who seized him by the collar and drew him up; then, assisting his companion in the same manner, he ran, bent like an old man, to the river brink. The horses were where François had first spied them. The prince understood that he could no longer hesitate; he was at the mercy of his aviors.

He ran to one of the three horses and jumped on it, while his companions did the same. The same voice that

had already been heard whispered again, "Quick!" and they set off at a gallop.

"All goes well," thought the prince to himself; "let us hope that the end of the adventure will not differ from the beginning."

"Thank you, thank you, my brave Bussy," murmured the prince to his right hand neighbor, wrapped to his eyes in a large brown cloak.

"Ride on!" replied the latter, from the depths of his cloak; and the three horses and their riders passed on like phantoms. In this manner they reached the great moat of the Bastille, which they crossed on a bridge, improvised the day before by the Leaguers, who, not wishing to cut off communications with their friends, had found this means of facilitating all intercourse. The three horsemen rode on towards Charenton. The prince's horse seemed to have wings.

All at once the man on the right jumped the ditch and rode into the forest of Vincennes saying to the prince "Come!!"

The man on the left did the same, but without speaking. Since the moment of departure, not a word had he uttered. He had not even any need to urge his horse the noble animal cleared the ditch at one bound, and as he neighed, several other horses replied.

The duke wished to check his horse, as he feared some ambuscade, but it was too late. The animal was started at such a pace that he no longer felt the bit. However his two companions slackened their speed, and he did the same, finding himself in an open space in which were eight or ten men whose weapons glittered in the moon.

"Oh, oh," said François, "what does this mean monsieur?"

"*Ventre saint-gris!*" cried the one to whom the question was put, "this means that we are safe."

"You Henri!" cried the Duc d'Anjou, in amazement.

"You my liberator?"

"Eh," said the Béarnais, "does that surprise you? Are we not allies?" Then glancing around in search of

his second companion, "Agrippa, where the devil are you?"

"Here I am," said D'Aubigné, who had not yet opened his lips; "but how you treat your horses,—as if you had so many."

"Come, come," said the King of Navarre, "do not be cold. Provided we have two on which we may travel twelve leagues, it is all I need."

"But where are you taking me, cousin?" asked François, uneasily.

"Wherever you like," said Henri, "but let us go quickly. D'Aubigné is right, the King of France has better stables than I; and he is rich enough to kill twenty horses if he takes it into his head to pursue us."

"Am I really free to go where I wish?" asked François.

"Certainly, and I await your orders," said Henri.

"Very well, then, to Angers."

"You wish to go to Angers? Very well; you are at home there."

"But you, cousin?"

"I shall leave you within sight of Angers and hasten on to Navarre, where my good Margot expects me; she must be very lonesome without me."

"But did no one know you were here?" asked the Duke.

"I came to sell three of my wife's diamonds."

"Ah, very well!"

"And also to know if the League would really ruin me."

"You see it will not."

"Yes, thanks to you."

"How, thanks to me?"

"Oh, yes, no doubt, if instead of refusing to be chief of the League when you heard it was directed against me, you had accepted and joined my enemies, I was lost. So when I heard that the king had punished your refusal with imprisonment, I swore to free you; and I did."

"Always so simple," said the Duc d'Anjou to himself, "really, it is a sin to deceive him."

“ Go, my cousin,” said the Béarnais, with a smile, “ go to Anjou. Ah, M. de Guise, you think you have it all your way, but I send you a rather troublesome companion take care ! ”

And fresh horses being brought, both jumped into the saddle accompanied by Agrippa d’Aubigné, who followed them growling.

CHAPTER LIII.

THE FRIENDS.

WHILE Paris was in a ferment, Madame de Monsoreau accompanied by her father and two of those servants who in those days, could be recruited like auxiliary troops for an expedition, was journeying towards the Château de Méridor by stages of ten leagues a day.

She too was beginning to enjoy that liberty so precious to those who have suffered. The azure of the sky, compared to that sky always suspended like a pall over the black towers of the Bastille, the green foliage, the beautiful roads winding like undulating ribbons in the depths of the woods,—all this seemed fresh and young, rich and new, as if she had really left the grave in which her father believed she lay buried.

The old baron had grown twenty years younger. Any one seeing him erect in his saddle, spurring old Jarnac might have mistaken the noble lord for an old husband lovingly watching over his bride.

We shall not undertake to describe this long journey, free from all incidents save the rising and setting of the sun.

Diane would sometimes impatiently rise from her bed when the moon shone through the windows of her room in some wayside inn, wake up the baron and the attendant, and ride on a few leagues to hasten the end of this interminable journey.

At other times she would let Jarnac pass on, remain in on the top of a hill to see if any one followed ; but she sa-

only the valley, deserted save for a few scattered flocks, or the solitary steeple of some village church. Then her father would look at her and say,—

“ Fear nothing, Diane.”

“ What should I fear ? ”

“ Were you not looking to see if M. de Monsoreau was following us ? ”

“ Ah, true ! Yes, I was thinking of that,” said the young woman, with another look behind. Thus going from fear to hope and from hope to deception, Diane, about the end of the eighth day, reached the Château de Méridor, and was received at the draw-bridge by Madame de Saint-Luc and her husband, who had remained there during the absence of the baron.

Then began for these four people an existence such as has been dreamed by every man who has read Virgil and Theocritus. The baron and Saint-Luc hunted from morning till night. The hounds rushed up and down the hills in pursuit of a fox or a hare, and when this furious cavalcade thundered through the woods, Diane and Jeanne, seated side by side on the moss in some wooded nook, were startled for a moment, and soon resumed their tender and mysterious conversation.

“ Tell me,” said Jeanne,—“ tell me all that happened in our grave,—for you were really dead to us. See, the Hawthorn is shedding on us its last snowy blossoms, and the elders send us their sweet perfume. The soft sunlight falls between the great branches of the oaks. Not a breath of air, not a living being in the park, for the deer and foxes fled away at the sound of the hounds. Tell me, little sister, tell me.”

“ What shall I tell you ? ”

“ Are you happy ? Oh, those beautiful eyes, encircled by blue shadows, the pallor of your cheeks, your lips that vainly attempt to smile,—Diane, you must have a great deal to tell me.”

“ No, nothing.”

“ You are, then, happy—with M. de Monsoreau ? ” Diane shuddered.

" You see ! " said Jeanne, with a tender reproach.

" With M. de Monsoreau ! " repeated Diane. " Why did you utter that name ? Why do you evoke that phantom amid our woods, our flowers, our happiness ? "

" Well, I know now why your beautiful eyes are encircled with blue, and why they are so often raised towards heaven ; but I do not yet know why your mouth tries to smile."

Diane sadly shook her head.

" You told me, I think," continued Jeanne, placing her plump white arm around Diane's neck, " that M. de Bussy had showed much interest in you."

Diane blushed so violently that even her delicate, shell-like ear seemed suddenly aflame.

" M. de Bussy is a charming man," said Jeanne, and she sang,—

*" Un beau chercheur de noise,
C'est le Seigneur d'Amboise."*

Diane rested her head on her friend's shoulder and murmured in a voice sweeter than the song of the birds :

*" Tendre et fidèle aussi,
C'est le brave—"*

" Bussy !—say it," said Jeanne, warmly kissing her friend.

" Enough nonsense," suddenly said Diane ; " M. de Bussy no longer thinks of Diane de Méridor."

" That is possible," said Jeanne, " but I believe Diane de Monsoreau likes him."

" Do not say that."

" Why ? Does it displease you ? "

Diane did not reply to the question.

" I tell you that M. de Bussy does not think of me ; and he is right. Oh, I have been a coward," murmured the young woman.

" What are you saying ? "

" Oh, nothing, nothing ! "

" Come, Diane, do not begin to weep and accuse your

elf. You, a coward,—you, my heroine? No, you were
rced."

" I thought so. I saw dangers, precipices, before me. Now, Jeanne, these dangers seem mere fancies; these precipices, a child could have crossed them. I was a coward, I tell you. Oh, why did I not have time to reflect!"

" You speak in riddles."

" No, it is not yet that," cried Diane, rising in agitation. No, it is not my fault; he did not wish it; I recall the tuation, which seemed terrible to me; I hesitated, I doubted. My father offered me his support, and I was lightened. He,—*he* offered me his protection, but not in way to convince me. The Duc d'Anjou was against him. ou will say that the Duc d'Anjou was in league with onsoreau. If I wanted something,—if I loved some e, Jeanne, if ever I loved—"

And Diane, a prey to excitement, leaned against an oak, if her soul had exhausted her body, which no longer d the strength to stand alone.

" Calm yourself, dearest, and reason."

" I tell you that we have been cowards."

" We? Oh, Diane, of whom are you speaking? This is eloquent, my dearest Diane—"

" I mean my father and me. I hope you did not derstand anything else. My father is a gentle- an, and could appeal to the king. I am proud, and not fear a man when I hate him. But here is the cret of this cowardice. I understood that *he* did not ve me."

" You are deceiving yourself," cried Jeanne. " If you lieved that, in your present state, you would go and roach him yourself; but you do not believe that, and you know the contrary, you hypocrite," she added, with a inder caress.

" You may well believe in love," said Diane, as she sumed her place beside her friend,—" you, whom M. de Mint-Luc married in spite of the king; you, whom he

carried away from Paris ; you, who repay him for proscription and exile with your caresses."

" And he thinks himself richly paid."

" But I (reflect a little, and do not be egotistical)—I whom that fiery young man pretended to love, I who have fascinated the invincible Bussy, that man who knows no obstacles, well, I was publicly married. I appeared before the whole court, and he did not even look at me. trusted myself to him in the cloister of La Gypciennne. We were alone ; he had Gertrude and Rémy, his two accomplices, and myself,—an even more willing one. Oh when I think of it ! He could have carried me off through the church, under his cloak ! At this moment I saw him ill and suffering on account of me. I saw his languishing eyes, and his lips pale and parched with fever. If he had asked me to die to restore the light to his eyes, and the freshness to his lips, I would have died. Well, I went away, and he did not even attempt to hold me by a corner of my veil. Wait, wait ! Oh, you do not know how much I suffer ! He knew that I was leaving Paris to return to Méridor. He knew that M. de Monsoreau,—well, I blush to say it,—that M. de Monsoreau was not my husband. He knew that I was coming alone ; and all along the way, dear Jeanne, I kept turning, thinking every moment that I heard the gallop of his horse behind us. It was only the echo of the road. I tell you he is not thinking of me, and that I am not worth a journey to Anjou, when there are at court so many beautiful women whose smiles are worth a hundred avowals of the provincial buried at Méridor. Do you understand now ? Are you convinced that I am right ? Am I not forgotten and despised ?"

She had not finished these words when the branches of the oak cracked violently ; a cloud of dust and plaster came down from the old wall, and a man bounding from the ivy and wild berries fell at Diane's feet, who uttered a terrible cry. Jeanne drew back as she saw and recognized this man.

" You see I am here," murmured Bussy, kneeling an

respectfully kissing the hem of Diane's dress which he held in his trembling hands. Diane also recognized the count's voice and smile, and overcome by this unexpected happiness she opened her arms and fell unconscious on the breast of him whom she had just accused of indifference.

CHAPTER LIV.

THE LOVERS.

SWOONS of joy are neither long nor dangerous. Some have been dangerous, but the examples are very rare. Diane was not long in opening her eyes and finding herself in Bussy's arms, for he had not wished to allow Madame de Saint-Luc the privilege of receiving Diane's first glance. "Oh, count, it was horrible to surprise us so," she murmured.

Bussy expected other words, and, who knows (men are so exacting),—who knows if he did not expect something more than words, he who had so often witnessed returns to life after swoons?

Not only did Diane stop there, but she even gently withdrew from the arms of him who held her captive, and turned to her friend, who had discreetly walked a few steps away, then curious like all women of that charming spectacle offered by a reconciliation, she had softly turned, not to take part in the conversation, but to be near enough not to lose anything.

"Well, madame," said Bussy, "is this the way you receive me?"

"No," said Diane; "really, Monsieur de Bussy, what you have done is tender and affectionate, but—"

"Oh, no 'but,'" sighed Bussy, as he resumed his place by Diane's feet.

"No, no, not so on your knees, Monsieur de Bussy!"

"Oh, let me pray to you thus for an instant," said the count, clasping his hands, "I have so longed for this place."

"Yes, but to come and take it, you have climbed over the wall. That is not only improper for a man of your rank, but very imprudent on the part of one who cares for my honor."

"How so?"

"If any one had seen you!"

"Who could have seen me?"

"Our hunters, who passed behind the wall not fifteen minutes ago."

"Oh, rest assured, madame, that I take too many precautions for that!"

"Precautions! Oh, really," said Jeanne, "that is most romantic! Tell us about it, Monsieur de Bussy."

"To begin with, if I did not overtake you on the way it was not my fault. You travelled by one road and I by another; you came through Rambouillet and I through Chartres. Then listen and judge if your poor Bussy be not in love. I did not dare join you, and yet I could have done it. I felt that Jarnac was not in love, and that the worthy animal would not return in such haste to Méridor; neither did your father have any reason to hurry, since he had you with him. But I did not wish to see you in the presence of your father and the servants, for my greatest wish is not to compromise you. I travelled slowly devouring the handle of my whip, which was my greatest nourishment during those days."

"Poor fellow!" said Jeanne. "See how thin he is!"

"You finally arrived," continued Bussy. "I have taken lodgings in the suburbs of the city, and concealed behind the window, I saw you pass."

"Oh, *mon Dieu!*" said Diane, "are you in Angers under your own name?"

"For whom do you take me?" replied Bussy, with a smile. "No, I am a travelling merchant. See my cinnamon-colored doublet. That is a very popular color with drapers and goldsmiths. And then I have a certain anxious and uneasy look which is common to botanists. In short, I have not been noticed."

"Bussy, the handsome Bussy, has been two days in

provincial town, and has not yet been noticed ! No one would ever believe that at court."

"Continue, count," said Diane, with a blush. "How do you come here from the town?"

"I have two horses of choice stock. I ride out of the town on one, stopping to look at all the signs ; and no sooner am I out of sight than my horse takes a gallop which brings me three and a half leagues in twenty minutes. Once in the woods of Méridor, I ride until I find the park wall, which is very long, as the park is large. Yesterday I explored this wall for four hours, climbing here and there, in the hope of catching a glimpse of you. I had almost despaired of success, when, towards evening, saw you, just as you were returning to the house. The count's two great dogs capered around you, and Madame de Saint-Luc was holding up in the air a partridge which they tried to catch. You then disappeared ; I jumped the wall and ran here. I saw that the grass had been crushed, and concluded that you had adopted this spot, which is charming during the heat of the day. To be able to find my way back, I broke off some branches ; then I went home, which hurts me dreadfully—"

"From want of habit," interrupted Jeanne, with a smile.

"I do not deny it, madame. Well, then, sighing, I resumed the way to the city. I was very tired ; I had, moreover, torn my cinnamon-colored doublet as I climbed the trees ; and yet, in spite of the holes in my clothes and my weariness, my heart was filled with joy. I had seen you."

"This is an admirable story," said Jeanne, "and you have overcome many obstacles ; that is fine and heroic, but in your place, I would have preserved my doublet, and above all, taken care of my white hands. Look at yours, all scratched by the briars."

"Yes, but I would not have seen the one I came to see."

"On the contrary, I would have seen Diane de Méridor and even Madame de Saint-Luc much better than you did."

"What would you have done?" hastily asked Bussy.

"I would have gone straight to the Château de Méridor. M. le Baron would have pressed me in his arms, Madame de Monsoreau would have placed me beside her at table, M. de Saint-Luc would have welcomed me with joy, and Madame de Saint-Luc would have jested with me. It was the simplest thing in the world; it is true that lovers never think of easy methods."

Bussy shook his head, with a smile and a glance at Diane.

"Oh, no," he said, "your plan would have been suitable for any one else, but not for me."

Diane blushed like a child, and the same smile and glance were reflected in her eyes and on her lips.

"Good!" said Jeanne, "it seems I understand nothing about good manners."

"No," said Bussy, shaking his head, "no, I could not go to the *château*. Madame is married, and the baron owes to his daughter's husband, whoever he may be, a strict vigilance."

"Well," said Jeanne, "this is a lesson for me. Thank you, Monsieur de Bussy, I deserved it; that will teach me how to interfere with the affairs of madmen."

"Of madmen?" repeated Diane.

"Of madmen or lovers," replied Madame de Saint-Luc, "therefore—" she kissed Diane on the forehead, bowed to Bussy, and ran away. Diane tried to stop her, but Bussy seized both her hands, so she had to let her friend go. Diane and Bussy remained alone.

The young woman watched Madame de Saint-Luc as she walked away, then she sat down with a blush. Bussy lay down at her feet and said,—

"Was I not right, madame, and do you not approve me?"

"I do not wish to feign," replied Diane, "and besides you know the truth. Yes, I approve, but here my indulgence must stop. In wishing for you, in calling you as I did just now, I was mad, I was guilty."

“ What are you saying, Diane ? ”

“ Alas ! count, I speak the truth. I have the right to make M. de Monsoreau unhappy, for he has driven me to his extremity ; but I have this right in abstaining from making another happy. I can refuse him my presence, my smiles, my love ; but if I give these favors to another, would be robbing the one who is, after all, my master.” Bussy patiently listened to this moral lecture, which as greatly softened, it is true, by Diane’s grace and gentleness.

“ Is it now my turn to speak ? ” he asked.

“ Speak,” replied Diane.

“ Frankly ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ Well, of all that you have just said, madame, you do not find one word in your heart.”

“ What do you mean ? ”

“ Listen to me patiently, as I listened to you. You have overwhelmed me with sophisms.”

Diane made a movement.

“ The commonplaces of morality do not apply here,” continued Bussy. “ In exchange for sophisms, madame, shall give you truth. You say this man is your master, but did you choose him ? No ; fatality imposed him on you, and you submitted. Now, do you mean to suffer all your life the consequences of this odious constraint ? Then I must deliver you.”

Diane opened her mouth to speak, but Bussy stopped her with a gesture.

“ Oh, I know what you will say,” continued the young man. “ You will say that if I challenge M. de Monsoreau and kill him, that you will never see me again. Well, I may die of grief at this separation, but you will live free and happy ; you may give happiness to some gallant man who, in his joy, will sometimes bless my name and say, ‘ Thanks, Bussy, thanks for having delivered us from that terrible Monsoreau.’ And you yourself, Diane, who will not dare to thank me while I live, you will thank me when I am dead.”

Diane seized the count's hand and pressed it tenderly.

" You have not yet implored," she said, " and you already threaten."

" Threaten you ? Oh, God hears me, and he knows my intentions. I love you so ardently, Diane, that I do not act as another man would. I know that you love me. Do not deny it and class yourself with those vulgar hearts whose words are in contradiction to their actions. I know it, because you have confessed it. Then a love like mine radiates like the sun and vivifies all the hearts that it touches. I will not beg you, nor consume myself with despair. No, here at your feet I shall tell you, with my right hand on my heart,—on that heart which has never lied, either from interest or from fear,—Diane, I love you for my whole life ! I swear before Heaven that I shall die for you, that I shall die loving you ! If you say to me, ' Go ; do not rob another of his happiness ! ' I will rise from this place where I am so happy, and bow to you as I say to myself, ' This woman does not love me ; she never will love me.' Then I shall go, and you will never see me again. But as my devotion to you is even greater than my love, as my desire to see you happy will survive the certainty that I cannot be happy myself, as I did not rob another of his happiness, I will have the right to take his life if I sacrifice my own. This is what I shall do, madame, to save you from eternal slavery and deprive you of a pretext for rendering miserable any brave man who may love you."

Bussy was greatly moved as he uttered these words. Diane read in his brilliant and loyal glance all the vigor of his resolution. She understood that he would do as he said, that his words would turn into actions ; and like the April snow which melts in the sun, her resistance melted away beneath the fire of his glance.

" Well," she said, " I thank you for the violence you do me. It is still a delicacy on your part to take from me even the remorse of having yielded to you. Now, will you really love me even unto death as you say ? Shall I not be the toy of your fancy, and shall I not have some day

the odious regret of not having listened to M. de Monsoreau's love? But no, I have no conditions to make; am conquered, I surrender; I am yours, Bussy, in love at least. Remain, then, friend; and now that my life is yours, watch over us."

As she said these words, Diane placed one of her white and slender hands on Bussy's shoulder and offered him the other, which he pressed lovingly to his lips. Diane quivered beneath that kiss.

Jeanne's light footsteps were now heard approaching, accompanied by a little warning cough. She brought back a bunch of new flowers, and perhaps the first buttercup that had dared risk itself in the open air,—a red-and-black one.

The clasped hands parted instinctively. Jeanne noticed the movement.

"Pardon my disturbing you, my good friends," she said, "but we must go in, under penalty of being sent for. Monsieur le Comte, please return to your excellent horse, which travels four leagues in half an hour, and let us return as slowly as possible, because we shall have much to say to each other. Well, Monsieur de Bussy, this is what you use by your stubbornness,—the dinner, which is excellent, particularly for a man who has just had a long ride and climbed walls, then a hundred other amusements, to say nothing of the tender glances you might have exchanged. Come, Diane, let us go in."

And Jeanne took her friend's arm and made a slight effort to drag her away. Bussy looked at the two friends with a smile. Diane, who was still turned towards him, extended her hand. He approached.

"Well," he asked, "have you nothing more to say?"

"Till to-morrow," replied Diane. "Is it not agreed?"

"Only to-morrow?"

"To-morrow and always."

Bussy could not restrain a little cry of joy. He bent over Diane's hand; then, throwing a last farewell to the two women, he went, or rather fled, away.

He felt the need of an effort of will to consent to separate

from the one whom he had so long despaired of seeing. Diane followed him with her eyes until he had disappeared and listened until the sound of his footsteps had died away.

"And now," said Jeanne, when Bussy had entirely disappeared, "let us have a little talk."

"Oh, yes!" said the young woman, starting as if her friend's voice had awakened her from a dream. "I am listening."

"Well, you see, to-morrow I shall go hunting with Saint-Luc and your father."

"What! will you leave me alone in the *château*?"

"Listen, dear friend," said Jeanne, "I, too, have my principles of morality; and there are certain things to which I cannot consent."

"Oh, Jeanne," cried Madame de Monsoreau, turning pale, "can you speak so harshly to me, your friend?"

"This is not a question of friends; I cannot continue so."

"I thought you loved me, Jeanne, and now you are breaking my heart," said the young woman, with tears in her eyes. "You say you will not continue what?"

"Continue to prevent two poor lovers from loving each other to their heart's content," murmured Jeanne in her friend's ear.

Diane seized in her arms the laughing young woman and covered her face with kisses. While she held her, the joyous sound of hunting-horns was heard.

"Come, they are calling us," said Jeanne. "Poor Saint-Luc is becoming impatient. Do not be harder on him than I wish to be on the lover in the cinnamon doublet."

CHAPTER LV.

HOW BUSSY WAS OFFERED THREE HUNDRED PISTOLES FOR HIS HORSE, AND GAVE HIM FOR NOTHING.

HE next day Bussy left Angers before the earliest waking *ourgeois* had had his breakfast. He did not ride, he flew long the road. Diane had gone on the terrace, whence he could see the white road winding in among the green rairies. She saw a black speck advance like a meteor, and immediately went down, not to give Bussy time to wait. The sun had hardly reached the summit of the reat oaks ; the grass was glistening with dew ; far away in the mountains could be heard Saint-Luc's hunting-horn, which Jeanne urged him to sound to remind her friend of the service she was rendering her in leaving her lone.

There was such deep, heartfelt joy in Diane's heart ; she felt so intoxicated with her youth, her beauty, and her love, that it seemed sometimes as if her soul had wings which raised her body nearer to God. But the distance was a long one from the house to the thicket, and she was soon wearied of running through the thick grass. She was forced several times to stop to breathe, and reached the place of meeting just as Bussy appeared above the wall.

He saw her run ; she uttered a little cry of joy. He came to her with open arms, and she rushed to meet him with both hands pressing her heart. They met with a strong, tender embrace.

What had they to say ? That they loved each other. What had they to think about ? They saw each other. What had they to wish for ? They were seated side by side and hand in hand.

The day passed like an hour.

When Diane first awakened from that soft torpor which is the sleep of the happy soul, Bussy pressed her to his heart and said,—

“ Diane, it seems to me that my life has begun only to-day, that only now do I begin to see on the road which leads to eternity. You are the light that reveals so much happiness to me. I knew nothing of this world nor of the condition of men, so I can only repeat what I said yesterday, that having begun to live by you, it is with you that I shall die.”

“ And I,” she replied,—“ I who one day threw myself without regret into the arms of death, I tremble to-day at not being able to live long enough to enjoy all the treasures of your love. But why do you not come to the *château* of Louis ? My father would be happy to see you ; M. de Saint-Luc is your friend, and he is discreet. Think of being able to see each other one hour longer.”

“ Alas ! Diane, if I go to the castle for one hour, I shall go always ; if I go, the whole province will know of it, and the report will reach the ears of that ogre, your husband, who will hasten hither. You have forbidden me to deliver you from him.”

“ Why should you ? ” she asked, with that expression which we never find but in the voice of the woman who loves.

“ Well, for our safety, for the safety of our love, we must hide our secret from all. Madame de Saint-Luc already knows it ; Saint-Luc will know it too.”

“ Oh, why ? ”

“ Would you conceal anything from me now ? ” asked Bussy.

“ No, that is true.”

“ I wrote this morning to Saint-Luc to ask him to meet me to-morrow at Angers. He will come, and I shall have his word as a gentleman never to breathe a word of the adventure. This is all the more important, dear Diane, as they are doubtless seeking me everywhere. Things looked serious when I left Paris.”

“ You are right ; and then my father is a scrupulous man, and though he loves me, he might be capable of denouncing me to M. de Monsoreau.”

“ Let us hide well ; and if God should hand us over to

our enemies, we may at least say it was impossible to act otherwise."

"God is good, Louis; do not distrust him at a time like this."

"I do not distrust God, but I fear some demon jealous of our happiness."

"Bid me good-by then, and do not ride so fast; your horse frightens me."

"Fear nothing, he already knows the way. He is the safest, gentlest horse that I have ever ridden. When I turn towards the city, buried in my pleasant thoughts, he takes me there without my even touching the bridle."

The two lovers exchanged many other tender speeches, interrupted by kisses. Finally the hunting-horn rang out the call which had been agreed upon with Jeanne, and Bussy left.

As he approached the city, dreaming of this happy day, and proud of being free from the honors and favors of a prince which are always gilded chains, he observed that the hour approached for the closing of the gates. The horse, which had browsed all day on the grass and briage, continued to do the same on the way home, and night was falling.

Bussy was preparing to ride on to make up for lost time, when he heard behind him the gallop of several horses. For a man who hides, and above all, for a lover, everything seems threatening. Happy lovers have this in common with thieves. Bussy was wondering if it would be better to gallop ahead or throw himself to one side to allow the horsemen to pass on, but they rode so swiftly that they were soon near him.

There were two.

Bussy, thinking it would be cowardly to avoid two men when one is worth four, drew to one side, and perceived one of the horsemen, whose spurs were buried in the flanks of his steed, which was stimulated besides by the blows of his companion.

"Come, here is the city," said the man, with a most

pronounced Gascon accent ; “ three hundred more blows with the whip and spur ! courage and vigor ! ”

“ The animal can no longer breathe ; he shivers and totters,” replied the one who rode before, “ I would give a hundred horses to be in my city.”

“ It is some belated Angevin,” said Bussy to himself “ yet—how stupid do people become when they fear !—thought I recognized this voice. But that man’s horse is falling—”

At this moment the horsemen were near Bussy.

“ Ah, take care, monsieur,” he cried. “ Leave your horse ; he is about to fall.”

The horse did, in fact, fall heavily on one side, moved one leg convulsively, and all at once his labored breathing ceased, his eyes grew dim, and he died.

“ Monsieur,” cried the dismounted horseman to Bussy “ three hundred pistoles for your horse.”

“ Ah, *mon Dieu !* ” cried Bussy, as he approached.

“ Do you hear me, monsieur ? I am in a hurry—”

“ Ah, monseigneur, take it for nothing,” said Bussy trembling with indescribable emotion, for he had just recognized the Duc d’Anjou. At the same moment the prince’s companion was heard cocking his pistol.

“ Stop ! ” cried the Duc d’Anjou to this pitiless defender ; “ the devil take me ! M. d’Aubigné, it is Bussy.

“ Yes, prince, it is I ; but why the devil are you killin horses on this road and at this hour ? ”

“ Ah, it is M. de Bussy,” said D’Aubigné, “ then monseigneur, you no longer need me. Permit me to return to him who sent me.”

“ Not without receiving my very sincere thanks and the promise of my firm friendship,” said the prince.

“ I accept both, monseigneur, and will recall you words to you some day.”

“ M. d’Aubigné—monseigneur—what is all this ? ” asked Bussy.

“ Did you not know ? ” asked the prince, with an expression of discontent and suspicion which did not escape Bussy. “ As you are here, did you not expect me ? ”

"The devil!" said Bussy to himself as he reflected how very curious his mysterious presence in Anjou would seem to the suspicious mind of the prince. "Let us not compromise ourselves.—I did better than expect you," he said; "and if you wish to enter the city before the closing of the gates, jump into the saddle, monseigneur."

He offered his horse to the prince, who was busy removing some important papers from the saddle of the dead animal.

"Farewell, monseigneur," said D'Aubigné as he turned his horse's head, "M. de Bussy, your servant."

And he rode away.

Bussy jumped lightly on the horse behind his master, and directed his horse towards the city, asking himself if his prince dressed in black were not some evil spirit sent to disturb his happiness. They entered Angers just as the trumpets of the aldermanship sounded.

"What shall we do now, monseigneur?"

"To the castle! Let them raise my banner, and recognize me, and I wish all the nobility of the province to be summoned."

"Nothing is easier," said Bussy, who made up his mind to gain time by being submissive, and who was, moreover, too surprised to be anything but passive.

"Hey! trumpets!" he cried to the heralds who were returning after their first flourish. The latter looked at him and did not pay much attention because they saw two poor, dusty men with no retinue.

"Ho! ho!" said Bussy advancing towards them. "Is not the master known in his own house? Send for the alderman on duty."

His haughty tone imposed on the heralds; one of them approached.

"Great heavens!" he cried in terror after a good look at the duke, "is not this our lord and master?"

The duke was easily recognized on account of the deformity of his nose, divided in two according to the words of Chicot's song.

" Monseigneur the duke," he added, seizing the arm of the second herald, who started in surprise.

" You now know quite as much as I do," said Bussy, " so get up your wind, that the whole city may know within fifteen minutes that the duke has arrived. We shall go slowly on to the *château*. By the time we reach there, everything will be in readiness to receive us."

At the first sound of the trumpets a group collected at the second, the women and children ran about crying, —

" Monseigneur is in the city! *Noël* to Monseigneur!"

The aldermen, the governor, the principal gentlemen rushed to the palace, followed by a crowd which increased at every minute. As Bussy had foreseen, the authorities of the city had preceded the duke to the palace to give him a fitting reception. When he reached the quay, he could scarcely get through the crowd; but Bussy found one of the heralds, who used his trumpet to open a passage for the prince as far as the steps of the Hôtel de Ville. Bussy formed the rear guard.

" Gentlemen and faithful subjects," said the prince, " I have come to throw myself into my good city of Angers. In Paris, the most terrible dangers have threatened my life; I had even lost my liberty. I succeeded in escaping thanks to my good friends!"

Bussy bit his lip as he felt the ironical meaning of these words.

" And since I am in your city, I feel that my peace and life are assured."

The astonished magistrates gave a feeble cry of " Long live our lord!" while the people, hoping for the usual gratuities, shouted lustily, "*Noël!*"

" Let us sup," said the prince. " I have taken nothing since the morning."

The duke was immediately surrounded by all the train of retinues he kept at Angers as Duc d'Anjou, though the principal officers alone knew their master. Then came all

the gentlemen and ladies of the city. The reception lasted until midnight.

The city was illuminated, musket-shots were heard in the streets and squares, the cathedral bell rang, and the wind carried to Méridor the sound of the noisy joy of the good Angevins.

CHAPTER LVI.

THE DIPLOMACY OF THE DUC D'ANJOU.

WHEN the firing of the muskets had ceased in the streets, the bells ceased to ring, and the ante-chambers emptied themselves ; when the Duc d'Anjou and Bussy were at last alone, —

“ Let us talk,” said the duke.

François, with his usual quickness, had understood that Bussy had made more advances than usual. With his knowledge of the court, he concluded that Bussy was in an embarrassing position, and that with a little skill he might take advantage of him. But Bussy had had time to recover himself and was ready for the prince.

“ Let us talk, monseigneur,” he replied.

“ The last time we met,” said the prince, “ you were very ill, my poor Bussy.”

“ Very true, monseigneur,” replied the young man, “ and I was only saved by a miracle ! ”

“ That day,” continued the duke, “ you had with you a certain doctor very anxious to save you, for he snapped most vigorously at all who approached you.”

“ That is still true, for Le Haudoin loves me dearly.”

“ He kept you rigorously in bed, did he not ? ”

“ At which I was in a great rage, as your Highness must have seen.”

“ But if you were so enraged,” said the duke, “ you might have sent the faculty to the devil, and come with me, as I begged you.”

“ Well ! ” said Bussy, turning and twisting his apothecary's hat.

"But," continued the duke, "as it was a grave affair you were afraid of compromising yourself."

"What!" said Bussy, planting his hat on his head. "I think you said I was afraid of compromising myself."

"I did," replied the Duc d'Anjou.

"Well, then it is a lie, monseigneur," he cried,—"a lie to yourself, because you do not believe one word of what you say. There are twenty scars on my body which prove that I have sometimes compromised myself, but that I have never been afraid; and upon my word, I know a good many people who could not say as much, and above all, prove as much."

"You always have unanswerable arguments, M. de Bussy," replied the duke, very pale and agitated. "When you are accused, you cry louder than the accuser, and persuade yourself that you are right."

"I am not always right, monseigneur, and I know it but I also know when I am in the wrong."

"And when are you in the wrong?—pray tell me."

"When I serve ungrateful people."

"In truth, monsieur, I think you are forgetting yourself," said the prince, rising with that dignity he could assume at times.

"Well, I forget myself, monseigneur," said Bussy. "Once in your life do the same, and forget yourself, or forget me." Bussy stepped towards the door, but the prince was quicker, and barred the way.

"Will you deny, monsieur, that after refusing to go out with me, you went out a few minutes later?"

"I deny nothing, monseigneur," said Bussy, "unless it be what you would like to force me to confess."

"Then tell me why you obstinately remained in your house."

"Because I had business."

"At home?"

"At home or elsewhere."

"I thought that when a gentleman was in the service of a prince, his principal business was that of the prince."

" And who does your business usually, if not I, monseigneur ? "

" I do not say the contrary," said François, " and I usually find you faithful and devoted. I shall even say more : I excuse your ill-temper."

" Ah, you are very kind."

" Yes, because you had some reason to be angry with me."

" You acknowledge that, monseigneur ? "

" Yes. I had promised you the disgrace of M. de Monsoreau. It seems you detest him cordially."

" I ? Not at all. I find his face ugly, and I wanted him away, not to have that face before my eyes. You, on the contrary, like that face ; there is no accounting for tastes."

" Well, as this was your only excuse to sulk like a cross, spoiled child, I shall say that you were doubly wrong not to wish to come out with me and then go out afterwards to commit follies."

" I committed useless follies, and just now you reproached me — Come, monseigneur, be consistent ; what follies have I committed ? "

" No doubt you hate M. d'Epernon and M. de Schomberg, and I understand that. I, too, hate them mortally ; but you should have been satisfied with hating, and bided your time."

" Oh, oh," said Bussy, " what next, monseigneur ? "

" Kill them, *morbleu !* kill them both ! kill them all four, and I shall be more than grateful ; but do not exasperate them, particularly when you are safely away, because then their exasperation falls on me."

" Come, what have I done to this worthy Gascon ? "

" You mean D'Epernon ? "

" Yes."

" Why, you had him stoned."

" I ? "

" So that his doublet was in shreds, his cloak in rags, and he returned to the Louvre in his hose."

" Good ! " said Bussy, " so much for one ; now let us

pass on to the German. What have I done to M. de Schomberg?"

" Will you deny that you had him dyed blue? When I saw him, three hours after his accident, he was still azure colored; and you call that a good joke. Come now!"

And the prince began to laugh in spite of himself, while Bussy, recalling Schomberg's appearance in the vat, broke into peals of laughter.

" Well," he said, " so I have the credit of having played them these tricks?"

" *Pardieu!* It is I, perhaps?"

" And you have the courage to reproach a man who has such ideas! As I said just now, monseigneur, you are an ungrateful man."

" Very good. Now, if you really went out for that, I forgive you."

" Really?"

" Yes, upon my word; but you are not yet at the end of my complaints."

" Go on."

" Let us talk about myself."

" I am listening."

" What did you do to save me from my difficulties?"

" You see for yourself what I did," said Bussy.

" No, I do not see."

" Well, I started for Anjou."

" That is, you ran away."

" Yes, because by saving myself I saved you."

" But instead of going so far, could you not remain near Paris? I think you might have been more useful to me at Montmartre than at Angers."

" Ah, here we differ, monseigneur; I preferred coming to Anjou."

" You will acknowledge that your whim is a very poor reason."

" No, because the object of this whim was to gather your partisans."

" Ah, this is different. Now, what have you done?"

"I shall explain to-morrow, monseigneur, because I must now leave you."

"And why must you go?"

"I have an appointment with a most important personage."

"Ah, in that case go, Bussy, but be prudent."

"Prudent? Why? Are we not the strongest here?"

"No matter; you must risk nothing. Have you already done much?"

"How could I, when I have only been here two days?"

"But you keep yourself concealed, I hope?"

"I should think so, *morbleu!* Look at my costume. Am I in the habit of wearing cinnamon-colored doublets? Yet it is for your sake that I assumed this horrible garb."

"And where are you lodging?"

"Ah, here is the time for you to appreciate my devotion,—in a tumble-down old house near the rampart, with an outlet on the river. But how did you get out of the Louvre? How did I happen to meet you on the high-road in company with M. d'Aubigné?"

"Because I have friends," said the prince.

"You have friends?" said Bussy. "Come now!"

"Yes, friends whom you do not know."

"Ah, indeed! and who are these friends?"

"The King of Navarre and M. d'Aubigné, whom you saw."

"The King of Navarre,—ah, very true! Did you not plot together?"

"I have never plotted, M. de Bussy."

"No? Ask poor La Mole and Coonnas."

"La Mole," said the prince, gloomily, "had committed another crime besides the one for which he is supposed to have died."

"Well, let us leave La Mole and return to you, particularly as we shall have some trouble in agreeing on that point. How the devil did you leave the Louvre?"

“ Through the window.”

“ Ah, indeed ! Through which one ? ”

“ The one in my bedroom.”

“ So you knew about the rope ladder ? ”

“ What rope ladder ? ”

“ The one in the closet.”

“ Ah, it seems you knew it too,” said the prince, turning pale.

“ Well,” said Bussy, “ your Highness knows that I have sometimes had the good fortune of entering that room.”

“ In my sister Margot’s time ? And you came in through the window ? ”

“ Why, you came out that way. I am only surprised that you should have found the ladder.”

“ I did not find it.”

“ Well, who, then ? ”

“ No one ; I was told about it.”

“ Who told you ? ”

“ The King of Navarre.”

“ Ah, ah, the King of Navarre knows the ladder ! I would not have thought so. However, you are now safe and sound, and we shall put Anjou in flames and Angoumois and Béarn will catch the light ; that will make a nice little fire.”

“ But did you not speak of an appointment ? ” asked the duke.

“ Ah, yes, *morbleu !* but this interesting conversation made me forget it. Adieu, monseigneur.”

“ Do you take your horse ? ”

“ Well, if it will be of use to you, monseigneur, you may keep it ; I have another.”

“ Then I accept. We shall settle our accounts later.”

“ Yes, monseigneur, and I pray to Heaven that I may not remain your debtor.”

“ Why so ? ”

“ Because I do not like the one who settles those matters for you.”

“ Bussy ! ”

“ Ah, true, monseigneur, we had agreed not to speak of that.”

The prince, who felt how much he needed Bussy, held out his hand to him.

Bussy gave him his own, shaking his head, and they parted.

CHAPTER LVII.

M. DE SAINT-LUC'S DIPLOMACY.

BUSSY returned home in the pitch dark, but instead of finding Saint-Luc, as he expected, he found only a letter announcing the visit of his friend for the next day. In fact Saint-Luc left Méridor at about six o'clock in the morning, and followed by one attendant, took the road to Angers.

He had reached the foot of the ramparts at the opening of the gates, and without noticing the agitation of the people, he had reached Bussy's house.

The two friends embraced warmly.

“ My dear Saint-Luc,” said Bussy, “ accept the hospitality of my poor hut ; I am only camping at Angers.”

“ Yes,” said Saint-Luc, “ after the fashion of conquerors, on the field of battle.”

“ What do you mean, my dear friend ? ”

“ That my wife has no secrets for me, as I have none for her, my dear Bussy, and she has told me all. We have everything in common. Receive my congratulations, my master in all things ; and since you have sent for me, allow me to offer you a piece of advice.”

“ Speak.”

“ Rid yourself at once of that abominable Monsoreau. No one at court knows of your relations with his wife ; now is the moment, only you must not let it escape. When you marry the widow later on, no one will say that you made her a widow in order to marry her.”

" There is only one objection to this fine project, which had also occurred to me."

" You see : well, what is it ? "

" I have sworn to Diane to respect the life of her husband, so long as he does not attack me of course."

" You were wrong."

" I ? "

" You were very wrong."

" Why so ? "

" Because you should never take such oaths. The devil ! if you do not hasten and take the initiative, Monsoreau will discover you ; and as he is anything but chivalrous, he will kill you."

" I shall bow to the will of God," said Bussy, with a smile. " But besides the fact that I would break my oath to Diane if I killed her husband—"

" Her husband !—you know he is not."

" Yes, but he bears the title, nevertheless. Besides breaking my promise, every one would blame me ; and that man who is now a monster in the eyes of all, would appear an angel that I had laid in his grave."

" Therefore, I do not advise you to kill him yourself."

" Assassins ! Ah, Saint-Luc, you are giving me poor advice."

" Come, now, who spoke of assassins ? "

" Well, what else are you thinking about ? "

" Nothing, my friend ; only an idea which came to me, and which is not sufficiently ripe to be communicated. I do not love Monsoreau any more than you do, though I have not the same reasons for hating him ; let us therefore leave the husband and speak of the wife."

Bussy smiled.

" You are a splendid companion, Saint-Luc," he said, " and you may count on my friendship. Now, you know my friendship consists of three things,—my purse, my sword, and my life."

" Thank you," said Saint-Luc, " I accept, but with the privilege of returning the devotion."

" Now, what did you want to tell me about Diane ? "

" I wanted to ask you if you had not the intention of coming sometimes to Méridor."

" My dear friend, I thank you for insisting, but you know my scruples."

" I know everything. At Méridor you run the risk of meeting Monsoreau, though he is two hundred miles away; you run the risk of having to take his hand, and it is hard to take the hand of a man you would like to throttle; finally, you might have to see him kiss Diane, and it is very hard to see another man kiss the woman we love."

" Ah," cried Bussy, with rage, " how well you understand why I do not go to Méridor! Now, my dear friend—"

" Do you dismiss me ? " asked Saint-Luc, mistaking Bussy's intention.

" Not at all ; on the contrary," replied the latter, " I beg you to remain, as it is now my turn to question."

" Speak."

" Did you not hear the sound of bells and musketry last night ? "

" Yes, and we even wondered what could be the matter."

" Did you not notice some change this morning as you passed through the city ? "

" Something like a great agitation ? "

" Yes."

" I was about to ask you the cause of it."

" It is caused by the arrival of the Duc d'Anjou."

Saint-Luc jumped up as if he had just heard of the presence of the devil.

" The duke at Angers ? He was said to be imprisoned at the Louvre."

" It is exactly because he was a prisoner at the Louvre that he is now at Angers. He succeeded in escaping through the window and has taken refuge here."

" Well ? " asked Saint-Luc.

" Well, my dear friend," said Bussy, " here is an excellent opportunity to revenge yourself for the king's little persecutions. The prince already has a party ; he will

have troops, and we shall stir up something like a nice little civil war."

" Oh, oh ! " said Saint-Luc.

" And I counted on you to fight beside me."

" Against the king ? " asked Saint-Luc, with sudden coldness.

" I do not exactly say against the king," said Bussy.
" I say, against all who will oppose us."

" My dear Bussy," said Saint-Luc, " I came to Anjou to breathe the country air, and not to fight against his Majesty."

" But let me at least present you to Monseigneur."

" It is useless ; I do not like Angers, and shall soon leave here ; it is a dark and gloomy city. The stones are as soft as cheese, and the cheese as hard as stone."

" My dear Saint-Luc, you would do me a great favor in consenting to this ; the duke asked me what I was doing here, and not being able to tell him, because he too loved Diane and failed with her, I made him believe that I was drawing to his cause all the gentlemen of the province. I even added that I had an appointment with one this morning."

" Well, say that you have seen the gentleman, who wishes six months for reflection."

" I think, my dear Saint-Luc, that your logic is as stubborn as my own."

" Listen ; I care but for one thing in this world,—my wife ; you only care for your mistress : let us make an agreement. Under all circumstances you will defend Madame de Saint-Luc as I pledge myself to defend Diane. We shall make a treaty for love, but not for politics. This is the only manner in which we can agree."

" I see I must yield to you, Saint-Luc, because at this moment you have the advantage. I need you."

" Not at all. It is I, on the contrary, who claim your protection."

" How so ? "

" Suppose the Angevins,—because that is the name the rebels will take,—suppose they besiege and sack Méridor?"

" Ah, the devil ! you are right," said Bussy ; " and you do not wish the inhabitants to suffer the consequences of a capitulation."

The two friends began to laugh, and as the firing of cannon was heard in the city, and Bussy's valet came to say that the prince had already called for him three times, they again pledged themselves to their agreement, and parted delighted with each other.

Bussy ran to the ducal palace, where the nobility thronged in large numbers. The Duc d'Anjou's arrival had soon spread throughout the provinces, and the towns and villages around Angers had all risen at this news.

The count hastened to arrange an official reception, a banquet and speeches ; he thought that while the duke would be receiving, feasting, and above all, making speeches, he would have time to see Diane, even if only for a moment. Then when he had given the duke occupation for several hours, he went home, jumped on his second horse, and galloped in the direction of Méridor.

The duke, left to himself, made very fine speeches, and produced a great effect by speaking of the League, touching discreetly on those points relating to his alliance with the Guises, and presenting himself in the light of a prince persecuted by the king on account of the excess of confidence which the Parisians had showed him.

During the answers the Duc d'Anjou passed all the gentlemen in review, carefully noting those who had already arrived, and even more carefully those who were absent.

When Bussy returned, it was four o'clock in the afternoon ; he jumped off his horse and presented himself before the duke, covered with dust.

" Ah, my brave Bussy, it seems you have been working."

" As you see, monseigneur."

" Are you warm ? "

" I have galloped very fast."

" Take care not to make yourself ill."

" There is no danger."

" Where have you been ? "

" In the neighborhood. Is your Highness pleased ? Has there been a large gathering of nobles ? "

" Yes, I am rather pleased ; but I missed some one."

" Who ? "

" Your *protégé*."

" My *protégé* ? "

" Yes, the Baron de Méridor."

" Ah ! " said Bussy, coloring.

" And yet I must not neglect him, though he neglects me. The baron has influence in the province."

" You think so ? "

" I am sure ; he was the correspondent of the League at Angers. He had been chosen by MM. de Guise, and those gentlemen usually know how to make a selection. He must come, Bussy."

" But if he should not come ? "

" If he does not come, I shall make the advances and go to Méridor."

" In person ? "

" Why not ? "

Bussy could not keep back the jealous fire that flashed from his eyes.

" After all, why should you not ? You are a prince, and a prince may do anything."

" Then you think he is still angry with me ? "

" I don't know. How should I know ? "

" Have you not seen him ? "

" No."

" As you have had business with all the great men of the province, I thought—"

" I should not have failed to go to him if he himself had not some cause to complain of me."

" About what ? "

" I was not sufficiently lucky in the promises I made him to be in any hurry to present myself before him."

" Has he not what he wished ? "

" How so ? "

" He wished his daughter to marry the count, and she has married him."

" Well, monseigneur, let us say no more about it," replied Bussy, and he turned his back on the prince.

François' words had furnished him with much food for thought. What could be the prince's real ideas with regard to the Baron de Méridor ? Were they really those he had expressed ? Did he look upon the old baron merely as a powerful and influential support to his cause, or were his political plans merely an excuse to approach Diane ?

Bussy examined the prince's position just as it was ; he saw him embroiled with his brother, exiled from the Louvre, and the head of a provincial insurrection. He weighed in the same scales the prince's material interests and his love fancies, and found that the former greatly outweighed the others.

Bussy was ready to forgive the duke all his other grievances in favor of that.

He spent the night feasting with his Royal Highness and the Angevin gentlemen, and in paying his respects to the Angevin ladies. Then, as musicians had been summoned, he taught them the newest dances.

It is needless to say that he excited the admiration of the ladies and the despair of the husbands ; and as some of the latter looked at him in a way he did not like, he twirled his moustache, and asked three or four of them if they would not like to take a walk in the moonlight. But as his reputation had preceded him to Angers, his offers were declined.

CHAPTER LVIII.

IN WHICH BUSSY FINDS A FRIEND.

AT the gate of the ducal palace, Bussy found a frank, loyal, and merry face, which he thought two hundred miles away.

" Ah," he said, with a feeling of genuine joy, " is it you, Rémy ? "

" Eh, mon Dieu ! yes, monseigneur."

“ I was about to write to you to come and join me.”

“ Really ? ”

“ Upon my word.”

“ In that case, all is for the best. I was afraid you might scold me.”

“ Why ? ”

“ Because I came without permission. But I heard that the Duc d’Anjou had escaped from the Louvre, and gone to his province ; I remembered that you were in the neighborhood of Angers ; I concluded there would be civil war, and a liberal exchange of blows, together with a good many holes in skins. Now, as I love my neighbor as I love myself, and even more, I hastened hither.”

“ You did right, Rémy. On my honor, I missed you.”

“ How is Gertrude, monseigneur ? ”

The gentleman smiled.

“ I promise you I shall ask Diane the next time I see her,” he said.

“ And I, in return, shall inquire about Madame de Monsoreau, the next time I see her.”

“ You are a charming companion. How did you find me ? ”

“ *Parbleu !* that was very difficult. I inquired the way to the ducal palace, and waited for you at the gate, after having taken my horse to the stable, where I recognized yours.”

“ Yes, the prince had killed his horse, so I lent him Roland ; and as he had no other, he kept it.”

“ I recognize you there. You are the prince, and the prince is the servant.”

“ Do not place me so high, Rémy ; you will see Monseigneur’s lodgings,” and as he spoke, he introduced Rémy into the little house on the rampart. “ You see the palace ; now settle yourself where you will, and how you will.”

“ That will not be difficult, and you know I do not need much room ; besides, if necessary, I can sleep standing. I am tired enough for that.”

The two friends, for Bussy treated Rémy more as a

friend than as a servant, now separated ; and Bussy, doubly happy at being between Diane and Rémy, slept until morning.

It is true that, to be able to sleep more peacefully, the duke had given orders that all firing should cease ; as for the bells, they had ceased of themselves, thanks to the sores on the ringers' hands.

Bussy rose early and ran to the castle, leaving orders that Rémy should come and join him. He was anxious to be present at the duke's awakening, to read his thoughts if possible, in the very significant yawns of the sleeper.

The duke awoke, but like his brother Henri, he seemed to wear a mask to sleep in. Bussy learned nothing in this way ; but he came prepared with a catalogue of things, each more important than the last.

First, a walk round the walls to examine the fortifications, a review of the inhabitants and their arms, a visit to the arsenal, a careful examination of the taxes of the province for the purpose of obtaining supplementary resources, finally, correspondence.

But Bussy was well aware that he could not count too much on the last named article ; the Duc d'Anjou wrote but little. Even at that time he observed the saying, that all writing remains. He was therefore prepared against all the evil thoughts that might come to the duke, but he was unable to discover anything.

“ Ah, ah,” said the duke, “ you, already ! ”

“ Faith ! monseigneur, I have been unable to sleep, so much did your interests weigh on my mind. What shall we do this morning ? What do you say to a hunt ?—Good ! ” said Bussy, to himself, “ here is an occupation I had not yet thought about.”

“ What ! ” said the duke, “ you pretend you have been thinking all night about my interests, and as a result of your meditation you come and propose a hunt ; come now ! ”

“ True,” said Bussy ; “ besides, we have no hounds.”

“ And no master of the hounds,” said François.

" Ah, really, I would find a hunt without him all the more agreeable."

" Well, I am not like you ; I miss him."

The duke said that in a singular tone, which Bussy observed.

" That worthy man, your friend, did not deliver you either, it seems."

The duke smiled.

" Good ! " said Bussy, " I know that smile ; it is the bad one. Let Monsoreau look to himself."

" You hate him, then ? " asked the duke.

" Monsoreau ? "

" Yes."

" Why should I hate him ? "

" Because he is my friend."

" On the contrary, I pity him."

" What do you mean ? "

" That the higher you raise him, the greater will be his fall."

" Ah, I see you are in a good humor."

" I ? "

" Yes, you always say such things to me when you are in a good humor ; no matter, I maintain what I said, that Monsoreau would have been very useful to us here."

" Why so ? "

" Because he has property in the neighborhood."

" He ? "

" He or his wife."

Bussy bit his lip ; the duke was bringing the conversation back to the same point which had given him so much trouble the day before.

" Ah, you think so ? " he said.

" No doubt. Méridor is three leagues from Angers; you know it, you who brought the old baron to me."

Bussy understood that he must not lose his position.

" Why, I brought him because he clung to my cloak ; and unless I had left one half in his hands, as Saint Martin did, I was compelled to take him. Besides, my protection was not of much use to him."

"Listen," said the duke ; "I have an idea."

"The devil!" said Bussy, who always feared the prince's ideas.

"Yes. Monsoreau won the first game, but would you like to win the second?"

"What do you mean, prince?"

"It is very simple. You know me, Bussy?"

"I have that misfortune."

"Do you think I am a man who will suffer an affront with impunity?"

"That depends."

The duke's smile contained even more evil intentions than the first one, while he bit his lip and nodded his head.

"Explain yourself, monseigneur."

"Well, the master of the hounds robbed me of a young girl I loved and made her his wife; I, in turn, will rob him of his wife and make her my mistress."

Bussy tried to smile, but in spite of his efforts, he only succeeded in making a grimace.

"Rob M. de Monsoreau of his wife?" he stammered.

"Why, nothing seems easier to me," said the duke.

"The wife is on her estates, and you told me that she hated her husband. I can therefore conclude without too much vanity that she will give me the preference over Monsoreau, particularly if I promise—what I shall promise."

"And what will you promise, monseigneur?"

"To rid her of her husband."

Bussy was on the point of crying, "Ah, why did you not do so at once?" but he had the courage to contain himself.

"Would you do this fine action?" he asked.

"You will see. In the mean time, I shall pay my respects at Méridor."

"You will dare?"

"Why not?"

"You will present yourself before the old baron whom you abandoned after having promised me—"

"I have an excellent excuse to offer."

"Where the devil will you find it?"

“ Eh, no doubt I shall say, ‘ I did not break off this marriage because Monsoreau, who knew that you were one of the principal agents of the League of which I was the chief, threatened to denounce us both to the king.’ ”

“ Ah, ah, did your Highness invent that one ? ”

“ Not altogether, I must admit,” replied the duke.

“ Then I understand,” said Bussy.

“ You understand ? ” asked the duke, deceived by this answer.

“ Yes.”

“ I shall make him believe that in sanctioning his daughter’s marriage I saved his own life, which was threatened.”

“ That is superb,” said Bussy.

“ Is it not ? But look out of the window, Bussy.”

“ What for ? ”

“ How is the weather ? ”

“ Well, I am forced to acknowledge that it is fine.”

“ Then order the horses and let us go and see Méridor.”

“ At once, monseigneur,” and Bussy, pretending to go out, walked to the door and came back. “ Pardon me, monseigneur,” he said, “ but how many horses must I order ? ”

“ Four or five, if you will.”

“ Then, if you leave it to me, I shall order one hundred.”

“ Why a hundred ? ” cried the prince, surprised.

“ To have about twenty-five on whom I can depend in case of attack.”

The duke started. “ In case of attack ? ” he repeated.

“ Yes, I have heard that there are a great many forests around here,” said Bussy, “ and there would be nothing surprising if we were to fall in an ambuscade.”

“ Ah, ah,” said the duke, “ you think so ? ”

“ Your Highness knows that real courage does not exclude prudence.”

The duke became pensive.

“ I shall order one hundred and fifty,” said Bussy ; and he advanced the second time towards the door.

“ Wait a moment,” said the prince.

“ What is the matter, monseigneur ? ”

“ Do you really think I am in safety in Angers, Bussy ? ”

“ The city is not very strong, but if it were well defended—”

“ Yes, but it may not be well defended ; and brave as you are, you can only be in one place at a time.”

“ Most probably.”

“ If I am not in safety in the city, and I am not, since Bussy has doubts—”

“ I did not say I had any doubts, monseigneur.”

“ Well, if I am not in safety, I must attend to that at once. I shall visit the castle and intrench myself.”

“ You are right, monseigneur ; good intrenchments are by far the best.”

Bussy stammered ; he was not accustomed to fear, and words of prudence came with difficulty from his lips.

“ And here is another idea—”

“ The morning is fruitful, monseigneur.”

“ I shall have the Méridors come here.”

“ Monseigneur, your ideas this morning are remarkable for their strength and vigor. Get up and visit the castle.”

The prince called his attendants. Bussy took advantage of this moment to go out. He went in search of Rémy, and found him in the ante-chamber. He took him into the duke's study, wrote a short note, gathered a bunch of roses in a hot-house, rolled the note around the stems, went to the stable, saddled Roland, invited Rémy to mount, and putting the bouquet into his hand, led him out of the city to the entrance of a sort of little path.

“ Now,” he said, “ let Roland go. At the end of the path you will find the forest, in the forest a park, and around this park a wall ; and at the part of the wall where Roland will stop you will throw this bouquet.”

“ The one who is expected will not come,” said the note, “ because the one who was not expected has come, more threatening than ever, because he still loves. Take with your lips and your heart all that is invisible to the eyes in his paper.”

Bussy let go the bridle, and Roland started off at a gallop in the direction of Méridor. Bussy returned to the palace and found the prince already dressed. As for Rémy, he executed his commission in half an hour. Carried off like the wind, Rémy, trusting to his master's words, rode over prairies, fields, brooks, and hills, until he reached a crumbling stone wall, where the horse stopped.

Having reached this point, Rémy stood up in his stirrups, and having securely fastened the note to the flowers, he gave a loud "hem!" and flung the bouquet over the wall. A little cry from the other side told him it had reached its destination.

Rémy had nothing more to do, as he had not been told to bring any answer, so he turned his horse's head towards the city, much to Roland's dissatisfaction, who evinced a lively discontent at being deprived of his accustomed repast on the acorns; but Rémy made energetic use of the whip and spurs, and Roland resumed his natural gait.

Forty minutes later he found his way to his new stable as he had just found it in the woods, and took his place before the manger filled with hay and oats. Bussy was inspecting the castle with the prince. Rémy joined him just as he was examining a subterranean passage leading to the postern.

"Well," he said to his messenger, "what have you seen? what have you heard, what have you done?"

"A wall, a cry, seven leagues," replied Rémy, with the laconism of those sons of Sparta who allowed foxes to devour their bodies for the greater glory of the laws of Lycurgus.

CHAPTER LIX.

A FLOCK OF ANGEVINS.

BUSSY contrived to occupy the Duc d'Anjou so well with his warlike preparations, that for the next two days I found neither the time to go to Méridor nor the opportunity to send for the baron. However, from time to

time the duke returned to his ideas of visiting ; but Bussy always had a thousand things to suggest,—inspection of the muskets of the guards, equipment of the horses, placing the cannons, etc., as if they intended to conquer one quarter of the earth.

Rémy, seeing all this, began to make lint, to sharpen his instruments, and prepare his salves, as if he was to cure half of the human race.

The duke then shrank before these enormous preparations.

It is needless to say that from time to time Bussy, under pretext of inspecting the exterior fortifications, would jump on Roland, and in forty minutes he had reached a certain wall, over which he climbed all the more easily that at every visit a few more stones crumbled down.

As for Roland, there was no need to give him any directions ; Bussy had but to close his eyes and leave him to himself.

“ I have already gained two days,” said Bussy, “ and I shall be very unlucky if, before two more days are passed, some other good fortune does not come to me.”

Towards the evening of the third day, as a large convoy of provisions was being brought into the city,—the produce of a requisition levied by the duke on his good Angevins,—while M. d’Anjou was gaining popularity by tasting the black bread and eating the salted herrings and fresh codfish of the soldiers, a great noise was heard at one of the gates of the city. The duke inquired whence came this noise, but no one could tell him.

There was a goodly interchange of blows being witnessed by a large number of citizens. A man, mounted on a white horse covered with foam, had presented himself at the Paris gate.

Now, Bussy, in consequence of his system of intimidation, had had himself appointed captain-general of Anjou, grand master of all the places, and had established the most severe discipline, notably in Angers. No one could leave the city without a password ; no one could enter without a password, a letter, or some other sign.

The only object of all this discipline was to prevent the duke from sending any one to Diane without his knowledge, or to prevent Diane's entering Angers. This will perhaps seem a little exaggerated, but fifty years later, Buckingham committed many other follies for Anne of Austria.

The man and the white horse therefore arrived at a furious gallop, and rushed headlong against the post of sentinels. But the post had received orders. The orders had been given to the sentinel, who had shouldered his musket ; the horseman seemed to pay little attention to this, but the sentinel cried,—

“ To arms ! ”

The post had appeared, and explanations had ensued.

“ I am Antraguet,” said the horseman, “ and I wish to speak to the Duc d’Anjou.”

“ We do not know Antraguet,” replied the man in command, “ but your desire to speak to the duke will soon be satisfied, because we shall arrest you and conduct you before his Highness.”

“ Arrest me ! ” replied the horseman. “ What a nice idea to arrest me, Charles de Balzac d’Entragues, Baron de Cuneo, and Comte de Graville ! ”

“ Yet it shall be done,” replied the *bourgeois*, who had twenty men behind him, and saw only one in front.

“ Wait a second, my good friends,” said Antraguet. “ You do not know Parisians, eh ? Well, I shall give you a sample of what they can do.”

“ Let us arrest him ! Let us take him to Monseigneur ! ” cried the furious militiamen.

“ Gently, my little lambs of Anjou,” said Antraguet. “ it is I who shall have this pleasure.”

“ What is he saying ? ” asked the *bourgeois*.

“ He says that his horse has only travelled ten leagues so he will pass over the whole of you, if you do not stand aside. Stand aside, I say, or *ventre bœuf*—”

And as the Angevin *bourgeois* did not seem to understand the Parisian oath, Antraguet drew his sword, and had soon disposed of the nearest halberds directed against

him. In less than ten minutes, fifteen or twenty halberds were changed into so many broomsticks.

The furious *bourgeois* rushed on the new-comer, who warded off their sticks with his sword, laughing all the while.

"Ah, what a fine *entrée*!" he said, as he roared with laughter. "Oh, these good citizens of Angers! *Morbleu!* how we can amuse ourselves here! The prince was right to leave Paris, and I was right to come and join him."

And Antraguet not only continued to tarry, but when his aggressors came too near, he would disable them with a stroke of his good Spanish blade. The citizens did their best, often striking each other, but returning to the attack; like the soldiers of Cadmus, they seemed to spring up from the ground.

Antraguet felt himself grow weary.

"Come," he said, as he saw the ranks grow thicker, "this will do. You are brave as lions, that is agreed, and I shall testify to that; but you see that you only have the handles of your halberds, and you do not know how to load your muskets. I had resolved to enter the city, but I did not know it was defended by an army of Cæsars. I abandon the attempt to conquer you. Good-night, I am going away. Only tell the duke I came on purpose to see him."

However, the captain had succeeded in lighting the match of his musket; but just as he was raising it to his shoulder, Antraguet struck him with his flexible cane such a furious blow on the knuckles, that he dropped his musket and began hopping, now on one foot, now on the other.

"To death! to death!" cried the bruised and furious militiamen. "He must not fly! he must not escape!"

"Ah," said Antraguet, "you would not let me enter a moment ago, and now you will not let me go. Take care! I shall change my tactics, and instead of using the flat of the sword, I will use the point; instead of cutting the halberds I will cut the wrists. Now, my little lambs of Angers, will you let me go?"

" No ; to death ! to death ! He is weakening ! let us knock him down ! "

" Very well, then, you are in earnest ? "

" Yes, yes ! "

" Well, take care of your fingers ; I shall cut hands."

He had scarcely finished speaking, and was preparing to carry his threat into execution, when a second horseman appeared on the scene and rushed like lightning into the *mélée*, which was gradually turning into a real combat.

" Antraguet ! " cried the new-comer, " what the devil are you doing among these *bourgeois* ? "

" Livarot ! " cried Antraguet turning round. " Ah, *mordieu* ! you are welcome. Montjoie et Saint-Denis, to the rescue ! "

" I was sure I would overtake you ; four hours ago I had news of you, and since then I have been following. But where are you ? Why are you being massacred ? "

" These are our friends of Anjou, who will neither let me go in nor out."

" Gentlemen," said Livarot, raising his hat, " would it please you to stand to the right or to the left as we pass in ? "

" They insult us ! " cried the *bourgeois*. " To death ! to death ! "

" Ah, so this is the way they are at Angers ? " cried Livarot, putting his hat on his head and drawing his sword.

" Yes, you see," said Antraguet ; " unfortunately they are numerous."

" Pshaw ! we three will soon put an end to them."

" Yes, if we were three, but we are only two."

" Here is Ribeirac."

" He too ? "

" Do you hear him ? "

" I see him. Hey, Ribeirac ! here ! here ! "

In fact Ribeirac, in no less of a hurry than his two friends, made the same kind of entrance into the city.

" Why, they are fighting," said Ribeirac ; " what luck ! Hey, Livarot, Antraguet ! "

" Let us charge them," replied Antraguet.

The *bourgeois* looked with amazement at the new reinforcement which had joined the two friends, who had now passed from the condition of the assailed to that of assailants. But apart from the fact that the invitation of their commander made them prudent, they saw the horsemen form in line and present such a warlike front that the stoutest hearts quaked.

" It is their advance guard ! " cried the *bourgeois*, wishing to have some pretext to flee. " Alarm ! alarm ! "

" Fire ! " cried the others, " fire ! "

" The enemy, the enemy ! " cried the remainder.

" We are fathers of families, and we belong to our wives and children ; save yourselves ! " roared the captain. And in consequence of all these cries, which tended to the same object, a frightful tumult arose in the street, and blows fell on those of the bystanders who prevented the flight. It was at this moment that the sound of the fray reached the square where the prince was busy tasting the bread and fish of his soldiers.

Bussy and the prince made inquiries, and were told that three men, or rather three devils from Paris, were making all this noise.

" Three men ? " asked the prince. " Go and see what that means, Bussy."

" Three men ? " said Bussy, " come, monseigneur."

Both started. Bussy went first, and the prince came behind, prudently escorted by about twenty horsemen. They arrived just as the *bourgeois* were beginning to execute the above-mentioned manœuvre, to the great detriment of the shoulders and skulls of the bystanders. Bussy rose in his stirrups, and his eagle eye recognized Livarot's long face in the *mêlée*.

" *Mort de ma vie !*" he cried to the prince in a thundering voice, " come, monseigneur. They are our friends from Paris who are besieging us."

" No," cried Livarot, whose voice rang out above the roar of the battle, " it is our friends of Anjou who are killing us."

"Down with your arms, knaves!" cried the duke, "down with your arms! These are friends."

"Friends!" cried the bruised and torn *bourgeois*, "then they should have had the password. For the past hour we have been treating them like pagans, and they have been treating us like Turks." And they continued to retreat.

Livarot, Antraguet and Ribeirac now advanced in triumph in the open space, and hastened to kiss the duke's hand, after which they threw themselves into Bussy's arms.

"It seems," philosophically said the captain, "that we mistook a flock of Angevins for a flock of vultures."

"Monseigneur," whispered Bussy to the duke, "will you please count your militiamen?"

"Why so?"

"Count them at a rough guess."

"They are about one hundred and fifty."

"Yes, at least."

"Well, what are you driving at?"

"That you have not very famous soldiers, since three men defeated them."

"True," said the duke. "What next?"

"Why, go out of the city with such fellows?"

"Yes, but I can go out with the three men who whipped the others."

"Oh, I had not thought of that," murmured Bussy.

"Trust a coward to be logical."

CHAPTER LX.

ROLAND.

THANKS to the reinforcement which had arrived, M. le Due d'Anjou was able to explore all the surrounding country. Accompanied by his friends, his suite had a warlike aspect of which the inhabitants of Angers were justly proud though the comparison between these well-mounted and

well-equipped gentlemen and the torn garments and rusty weapons of the militiamen was not precisely to the advantage of the latter.

They explored, first the ramparts, then the gardens adjoining these ramparts, then the country beyond the gardens ; and it was not without a feeling of pride that the duke rode through those woods which had at first so greatly frightened him.

The Angevin gentlemen came with money, and they found at the court of Anjou far more liberty than at the court of Henri III. ; they could not fail, therefore, to lead a merry life. Three days had not elapsed before Antragues, Ribeirac, and Livarot had become intimate with many of the nobles, particularly those who most admired Parisian fashions and customs. It is needless to add that these worthy nobles had young and pretty wives. It was therefore not for his own particular pleasure that the Duc d'Anjou rode so frequently through the streets of Angers. No ; these rides contributed to the pleasure of the Parisian gentlemen who had come to join him, of the Angevin nobles, and particularly of the Angevin ladies.

God must have greatly rejoiced at them, for the cause of the League was the cause of God. Then the king must unquestionably have been furious. Finally, the ladies were made supremely happy.

The great trinity of the period was therefore represented. God, the king, and the ladies. The general joy reached its height when twenty riding horses, thirty carriage horses and forty mules, together with litters, carriages, and wagons, all the property of the duke, arrived at Angers.

All this came from Tours for the modest sum of fifty thousand crowns, which the duke applied to these purchases.

It must be said that the horses were saddled, but the saddles were not yet paid for ; the coffers had magnificent locks which locked with a key, but the coffers were empty. This last fact was greatly to the prince's credit, because he might have filled them by exactions. However, it was

not in his nature to take openly; he preferred other means.

Nevertheless, the entrance of the *cortége* produced a magnificent effect in Angers. The horses were put in the stables, the wagons placed under the sheds. The coffers were carried in by the prince's most intimate friends,—he must trust in safe hands the sums they did not contain.

The palace gates were closed in the face of a rather considerable crowd. Thanks to this precautionary measure, the people were convinced that the prince had just brought about two millions into the city, whereas, on the contrary, he intended to get that amount from the inhabitants.

The duke's reputation for wealth was established from that day on; and after the sight on which they had feasted their eyes, the whole province was convinced that he was rich enough to make war against the whole of Europe if need be. This faith led the *bourgeois* to accept most patiently the taxes which the duke, following the advice of his friends, levied on the Angevins.

Besides, the Angevins almost anticipated all the duke's desires. We never regret the money we give or lend to the rich. The King of Navarre, with his reputation of poverty, would not have obtained one fourth of what the Duc d'Anjou obtained with his reputation of wealth.

But let us return to the duke.

That worthy prince lived like a patriarch on the fat of the land, and we all know that Anjou is a good province. The roads were covered with horsemen, coming from all sides to offer their adhesion or their services. M. d'Anjou, on his side, was always going about in search of some treasure. Bussy had succeeded in preventing any of these expeditions from going to the castle inhabited by Diane.

Bussy reserved that treasure for himself alone, and plundered after his own fashion that little corner of the province, which, after having properly defended itself, had made an unconditional surrender.

Now, while M. d'Anjou was reconnoitring and Bussy

was plundering, M. de Monsoreau, mounted on his hunting-horse, reached the gate of Angers. It might have been four o'clock in the afternoon ; to reach there by four o'clock, M. de Monsoreau had ridden thirty-five miles that day. His spurs were red, and his horse, white with foam, was half dead. The time had passed for objecting to any one's entering the gates ; the Angevins were now so proud and disdainful that a battalion of Swiss commanded by Crillon himself would have been allowed to enter.

M. de Monsoreau, who was not Crillon, entered, saying : " To the palace of Monseigneur the Duc d'Anjou."

He did not listen to the answer which the guards shouted after him. His horse was able to stand on his legs only thanks to a miracle of equilibrium due to the rapidity of his gait. The poor animal went on unconsciously, and would probably fall down when he stopped. He stopped before the palace, but both horse and rider remained standing.

" Monsieur le Duc !" cried the master of the hounds.

" Monseigneur is out reconnoitring," replied the sentinel.

" Where ? " asked M. de Monsoreau.

" Yonder," replied the functionary, pointing to one of the points of the compass.

" The devil ! " said Monsoreau. " I had something very important to say to the duke ; what shall I do ? "

" First, put your horse in a stable," replied the sentinel, " because if you do not lean him against a wall, he will fall."

" The advice is good," said Monsoreau ; " where are the stables, my good man ? "

" There."

At this moment a man approached the master of the hounds and asked for his name. M. de Monsoreau gave it, and the major-domo bowed respectfully ; the gentleman's name was well known in the province.

" Monsieur," he said, " please enter and take some rest.

Monseigneur only went out ten minutes ago, and will not return until eight o'clock to-night."

"Eight o'clock to-night!" replied Monsoreau, biting his moustache, "that would be too much waste of time. I am the bearer of a piece of news which I must tell him at once. Can you not give me a horse and guide?"

"There are ten horses, monsieur," said the major-domo. "As to a guide, that is different, as Monseigneur did not say where he was going; besides, I could not take any one from the castle walls. That is one of his Highness's recommendations."

"Ah, ah," said the master of the hounds, "are we not in safety here?"

"Oh, monsieur, one is always in safety in the midst of such men as MM. de Bussy, Livarot, Ribeirac, and Antraguet, without counting our invincible prince, Monseigneur the Duc d'Anjou; but you understand—"

"Yes, I understand that when they are away, there is less safety."

"Exactly, monsieur."

"Then I shall take a fresh horse and try to join his Highness."

"I am quite sure, monsieur, that you will succeed in overtaking Monseigneur."

"Did they not gallop away?"

"No, monsieur, quite the contrary."

"Very well, then, show me the horse I may take."

"Go into the stable, monsieur, and choose for yourself: all belong to Monseigneur."

"Very well."

Monsoreau entered. Ten or twelve beautiful fresh horses were enjoying a plentiful meal of the freshest hay of Anjou.

"There they are," said the major-domo.

Monsoreau glanced along the line of quadrupeds with the eye of a connoisseur.

"I shall take that bay horse," he said; "have it saddled."

"Roland."

" Is that his name ? "

" Yes ; he is Monseigneur's favorite horse. He rides him every day ; he was given to him by M. de Bussy, and you would surely not find him in the stable if his Highness were not trying the new horses that have just come from Tours."

" Ah, it seems I am not a bad judge."

A groom approached.

" Saddle Roland," said the major-domo.

As to the count's horse, he had entered the stable of his own accord and lain down in the straw without even waiting to be unsaddled.

Roland was ready in a few minutes.

M. de Monsoreau vaulted lightly into the saddle and inquired a second time the direction in which the duke's party had ridden away.

" They passed out of this gate and rode up that street," said the major-domo, pointing in the same direction as the sentinel had done.

" Faith ! " said Monsoreau, letting the reins hang loosely as he saw the horse go that way of his own accord, " it seems that Roland follows the scent."

" Oh, do not be uneasy," said the major-domo. " I have heard M. de Bussy and his physician, Monsieur Rémy say that he is the most intelligent animal in existence. So soon as he scents his companions, he will join them. See his beautiful legs ; a deer might envy them."

Monsoreau looked down. " Magnificent ! " he said.

In fact the horse had started off, and went slowly out of the city ; before reaching the gate, he even took a turn which shortened the way.

While he gave this proof of intelligence, the horse shook his head as if to rid himself of the bit which pressed against his mouth ; he seemed to say that all attempt to guide him was useless, and as he approached the city gates, he quickened his pace.

" Really," murmured Monsoreau, " I was not deceived. Since you know the way so well, go, Roland, go," and he

dropped the reins on the horse's neck. The horse having reached the outer road, hesitated for a moment whether to turn to the right or to the left. He turned to the left. A peasant passed at that moment.

"Eh, my friend, have you seen a troop of horsemen?" asked Monsoreau.

"Yes, monsieur," replied the man, "I met them down there," and he pointed in the direction taken by Roland, who now went off at a swinging trot, which meant three or four leagues an hour.

The horse followed the boulevard for some time longer, then turning suddenly to the right, took a path which cut right across the country.

Monsoreau hesitated for an instant to know if he should not stop Roland, but the horse seemed to know so well what he was about that he let him continue. As the animal went on, he gradually changed his trot into a gallop, and in less than a quarter of an hour had lost sight of the city. As the rider advanced, he seemed to recognize the localities.

"Well," he said, as he entered the forest, "one would say we are going to Méridor; I wonder if his Highness has come this way?" Monsoreau's brow became clouded as this idea passed through his mind for the first time. "Oh oh," he murmured, "I who was going to see the prince and put off seeing my wife until to-morrow, shall I have the pleasure of seeing them both together?" A terrible smile flitted across his lips.

The horse galloped along, keeping to the right with a tenacity which showed a most thorough knowledge of the way.

"On my soul," thought Monsoreau, "I can no longer be very far from the park of Méridor!"

At this moment the horse began to neigh, and another horse replied from the neighboring thicket.

"Ah, ah," said the master of the hounds, "it seems that Roland has found his companions!"

The horse galloped on, and passed like a flash through the tall trees. Monsoreau suddenly caught sight of a wall

and of a horse tied near the wall. The horse neighed a second time, and Monsoreau realized that he must have neighed first.

"There is some one here!" he said, growing pale.

CHAPTER LXI.

WHAT M. LE COMTE DE MONSOREAU HAD COME TO ANNOUNCE.

M. DE MONSOREAU went from one surprise to another ; the wall of Méridor rising before him, the horse he found there caressing the one on which he came, as if they were intimate companions,—all this was sufficient to rouse the suspicions of any one. As he approached, and we may be sure he did so quickly, he noticed the dilapidation of the wall. There was a real ladder which threatened to become a breach ; the feet seemed to have hollowed out steps in the stones, and the newly uprooted brambles hung by their withered stems.

The count took in the whole scene at a glance, then from the whole he passed to the details. The horse deserved the first place. The indiscreet animal wore a silver embroidered saddle-cloth ; in one of the corners was a double FF entwined round a double AA.

There was no doubt that this horse came from the prince's stables, since these were the initials of François d'Anjou. At this sight the count's suspicions were changed into certainties.

The duke had come this way ; he came often ; for besides the horse waiting there, another knew the way. Monsoreau concluded that since chance had put him on that track he must follow it to the end. This belonged to his attributes as master of the hounds and as a jealous husband.

But so long as he remained on the other side of the wall, it was evident that he would see nothing. He therefore

ties his horse near the other, and bravely began the ascent. This was an easy task ; there were places for the hands and feet, and even the overhanging branches of an oak had been carefully cut away. So many efforts were crowned with entire success. M. de Monsoreau had no sooner reached his point of observation than he perceived at the foot of a tree a blue mantle and a black velvet cloak. The mantle belonged unquestionably to a woman and the black cloak to a man. Besides, there was no need to look any further ; the man and woman were walking arm in arm, about fifty feet away. Their backs were turned to the wall, and they were half concealed by the foliage.

Unfortunately for M. de Monsoreau, the wall was not accustomed to his violent mode of ascent, and a large stone rolled from the crest and fell to the earth with a dull sound.

At this sound the individuals whose faces were concealed by the foliage turned and saw him, because the cry of a woman was heard, followed by a rustling of the branches as the lovers ran away like startled deer. At this cry Monsoreau felt cold drops of perspiration gather on his brow. He had recognized Diane's voice. Incapable of resisting the movement of fury that seized him, he jumped from the wall, and drawing his sword, began to follow the fugitives through the bushes. But they had disappeared, and nothing broke the stillness of the park,—not a shadow in the alleys, not a trace, not a sound, only the song of the birds, who, accustomed to the presence of the lovers, had not been frightened by them.

What could he do in the presence of this solitude ? What would he decide ? The park was large, and one might meet those one did not seek.

M. de Monsoreau concluded that the discovery he had made sufficed for the present ; besides, he felt too violently agitated to act with all the prudence necessary in dealing with a rival as powerful as François. Not one moment did he doubt that the prince was his rival. Then, if perchance it were not he, he had a mission to fulfil near the prince. Besides, when he found himself in the duke's

presence, he would soon know whether he were innocent or guilty. Then a sublime idea came to him. That idea consisted in getting at once over the wall and taking away with him the horse of the intruder surprised in the park. This vengeful project doubled his strength ; he ran to the wall and reached it, breathless and covered with perspiration. Then, with the help of the branches, he scrambled to the top and dropped down on the other side ; but there were no more horses. His idea was so good that it had also occurred to his enemy, who had taken advantage of it.

M. de Monsoreau was furious, and shook his fist at the impudent man who was no doubt laughing at him in the thick shadow of the woods ; but as his will was not easily conquered, he re-acted against the fates who seemed to be bent on overwhelming him. He found his way at once, and in spite of the approaching night, summoned his strength and returned to Angers by a cross-road which he had known from his earliest childhood. Two hours and a half later he reached the city gates, dying with thirst, heat, and fatigue ; but the exaltation of his mind gave strength to his body, and he was still the same man, at once violent and wilful.

He was, moreover, sustained by one idea. He would question the sentinels ; by going from gate to gate, he would know what man had come in with two horses ; he would empty his purse, make any promises, but would get a description of that man. Then, whoever he might be, sooner or later, this man should pay his debt. He examined the sentinel, but the soldier had just taken the post, and knew nothing. He entered the guard-house and inquired. A militiaman had seen a riderless horse return about two hours before, and the animal had taken the road to the palace. He thought some accident had happened to the rider, and that the intelligent horse had found his way back to the stable.

Monsoreau struck his head. The fates had decided that he should know nothing. He then went towards the ducal palace. There was great animation, great noise, and mirth. The windows shone like suns, the kitchens

sent forth enticing odors of game and cloves, capable of making the stomach forget its proximity to the heart. But the gates were closed, and here was another difficulty,—he must have them opened. Monsoreau called the *concierge* and gave his name, but the man would not recognize him.

“ You were straight, and now you are bent,” he said.

“ It is from fatigue.”

“ You were pale, and you are now red.”

“ It is from heat.”

“ You were on horseback, and you return without a horse.”

“ My horse took fright, shied, and threw me. Did you not see him return ?”

“ Yes, so I did,” said the *concierge*.

“ At all events, call the major-domo.”

The *concierge*, delighted at this opportunity of discharging his responsibility on another, sent for Monsieur Rémy.

Monsieur Rémy came and recognized Monsoreau.

“ Ah, *mon Dieu* ! whence do you come in such a state ?” he asked.

Monsoreau repeated the same story he had already told the *concierge*.

“ In fact,” said the major-domo, “ we were very uneasy when we saw your horse return without a rider ; particularly Monseigneur, whom I had notified of your arrival.”

“ Ah, Monseigneur seemed uneasy ?” asked Monsoreau.

“ Extremely so.”

“ What did he say ?”

“ That you should be sent to him at once on your return.”

“ Very well ; I shall only take time to visit the stable and see that nothing happens to his Highness’s horse.”

Monsoreau went to the stable, where he found the intelligent animal in the same stall whence he had taken him and eating with a good appetite. Then without even taking time to change his costume, because he thought the importance of the news he brought would excuse him from the formalities of etiquette, he went to the dining-

hall. His Highness and all the gentlemen of his suite were sitting round a table magnificently served and lighted. They were attacking pheasant pies, boars' heads, and other delicacies, accompanied by the dark-colored wine from Cahors, or the topaz-colored wine of Anjou, which goes to your head before it has ceased sparkling in the glass.

"The court is full," said Antraguet, as rosy as a maiden, and drunk as a trooper,—"full as Monseigneur's cellar."

"Not at all, not at all," said Ribeirac; "we have no master of the hounds. It is really shameful that we should eat the duke's dinner, and not get it for ourselves."

"I vote for any master of the hounds," said Livarot, "no matter who,—even M. de Monsoreau."

The duke smiled. He alone knew of the count's arrival. Livarot had scarcely finished his sentence, and the prince his smile, when the door opened, and M. de Monsoreau appeared.

As he caught sight of him, the duke uttered an exclamation, which sounded all the more noisy because it broke the general silence.

"Well, here he is," he said. "You see we are favored by heaven, since he is sent to us just when we wish for him."

Monsoreau, rather embarrassed by the prince's assurance, which was not customary in such cases, bowed rather awkwardly, and averted his head as though the glare of the lights hurt his eyes.

"Seat yourself and sup with us," said the duke, pointing to a place opposite his own.

"Monseigneur," replied Monsoreau, "I am thirsty, hungry, and weary; but I shall neither eat, drink, nor rest until I have delivered a message of the utmost importance which I have for your Highness."

"You come from Paris, do you not?"

"Yes, in great haste."

"Well, speak," said the duke.

Monsoreau advanced with smiling lips, but with hatred in his heart, and whispered to him,—

" Monseigneur, the Queen-mother is travelling hither by rapid stages ; she comes to visit your Highness."

The duke, on whom all eyes were fixed, showed his sudden joy.

" It is well ; thank you," he said. " M. de Monsoreau, I find you to-day, as ever, a faithful servant. Let us continue our supper, gentlemen." And he moved up to the table.

The feast continued. The master of the hounds was no sooner in a comfortable seat, and before a well-served table, than he lost all appetite.

The mind gained the ascendancy over matter.

His mind, carried away by sad thoughts, returned to the park of Méridor, travelling over the same road already followed by that same weary body. He saw once more the neighing steed, the crumbling wall, the fleeting shadows of the two lovers ; he heard once more Diane's scream,—that scream which had echoed in the very depths of his heart. Then, indifferent to noise, lights, and even to the meal, forgetting in whose presence he was, he buried himself in his own thoughts ; his brow gradually became clouded and he uttered a groan which drew the attention of the astonished guests.

" You are dead with fatigue, count," said the prince " you really ought to go to bed."

" Yes," said Livarot, " the advice is good ; and if you do not follow it, you run great risk of dropping asleep in your plate."

" Pardon me, Monseigneur," said Monsoreau, raising his head. " I am tired out."

" Drink," said Antraguet ; " there is nothing so restful."

" And then," said Monsoreau, " when we drink, we forget."

" Pshaw ! " said Livarot, " there is nothing to do ; see gentlemen, his glass is still full."

" Your health, count," said Ribeirac, raising his glass.

Monsoreau was obliged to answer the gentleman and emptied the glass at one gulp.

"He can still drink very well ; see, Monseigneur," said Antraguet.

"Yes," replied the prince, who tried to read the count's heart. "Yes, very well."

"You must give us a fine hunt," said Ribeirac ; "you know the country, count."

"You have estates and forests here," said Livarot.

"And even a wife," added Antraguet.

"Yes," replied the count, mechanically. "Yes, estates and forests and Madame de Monsoreau."

"Give us a boar hunt, count," said the prince.

"I shall try, Monseigneur."

"Eh, *pardieu !*" said one of the Angevin gentlemen, "you will try. What a fine answer ! The woods are full of boars. If I hunted, I would like to raise ten."

Monsoreau turned pale in spite of himself.

"Ah, yes, to-morrow," cried the gentlemen together.

"Will you hunt to-morrow, Monsoreau ?" asked the duke.

"I am always at your Highness's orders," replied Monsoreau ; "but as Monseigneur observed but a few seconds ago, I am very weary to hunt to-morrow. Then I must explore the neighborhood and see the condition of the woods."

"You must let him see his wife. The devil !" said the duke, in a good-humored way, which convinced the poor husband that he was the rival.

"Agreed, agreed," cried the young men, gaily. "We give M. de Monsoreau twenty-four hours to do all he can in his woods."

"Yes, gentlemen, give me that time," said the count, "and you may be certain that I shall employ it well."

"Now, count," said the prince, "I allow you to go to bed. Conduct M. de Monsoreau to his room."

M. de Monsoreau bowed and went out, being relieved of great weight. Persons in affliction are even fonder of solitude than happy lovers.

CHAPTER LXII.

HOW KING HENRI III. HEARD OF THE FLIGHT OF HIS BELOVED BROTHER, THE DUC D'ANJOU, AND WHAT FOLLOWED.

WHEN the master of the hounds had retired from the room, the repast continued more gay, joyous, and unrestrained than ever. Monsoreau's gloomy face had kept the young men in check because, under the pretext, and even the reality of fatigue, they had guessed that continual pre-occupation of gloomy subjects which put on the count's brow that mortal sadness which formed the characteristic of his expression.

When he was gone, the prince, who always seemed awkward in his presence, resumed his tranquil expression.

"Come, Livarot," he said, "when the master of the hounds entered you had just begun to tell us about your escape from Paris. Continue." And Livarot continued.

But as our title of historian gives us a better opportunity of knowing what had taken place, we shall substitute our story for that of the young man. It may, perhaps, lose in character, but it will gain in length, since we know what took place at the Louvre.

Towards the middle of the night Henri III. was roused by an unusual noise in the palace, where everything was usually so still after the king had retired. There were oaths, blows on the wall, rapid footsteps, and in the midst of all these sounds these words, repeated like an echo,—

"What will the king say? What will the king say?"

Henri sat up in bed and looked at Chicot, who, after having supped with his Majesty, had gone to sleep in the large armchair with his legs wound round his sword. The noise increased; Henri jumped out of bed covered with pomatum, and cried,—

"Chicot! Chicot!"

Chicot opened one eye. He was a prudent man, who appreciated sleep, and never woke up at once.

" Ah, you were wrong to call me, Henri. I dreamed you had a son."

" Listen ! " said Henri ; " listen ! "

" What do you want me to hear ? I think you talk enough nonsense all day without taking my nights ! "

" Do you not hear ? " cried the king, extending his hand in the direction whence came the noise.

" Oh, oh," cried Chicot, " I do hear cries ! "

" ' What will the king say ? What will the king say ? ' Do you hear ? "

" You may believe either one of two things : either your hound Narcissus is ill or the Huguenots are taking their revenge and making a Saint-Bartholomew of Catholics."

" Help me to dress, Chicot."

" I am willing, but first help me to rise, Henri."

" What a misfortune ! what a misfortune ! " was repeated in the ante-chambers.

" The devil ! this is becoming serious," said Chicot.

" We had better arm ourselves," said the king.

" It would be even better to go out at once through the little door and see for ourselves the extent of the misfortune instead of simply hearing about it."

Henri followed Chicot's advice, and found himself in the corridor leading to the Duc d'Anjou's apartments.

There they saw arms uplifted towards heaven and heard exclamations of despair.

" Oh, oh," said Chicot, " I can guess ! Your unfortunate prisoner has probably hanged himself. *Ventre de biche !* Henri, I congratulate you ; you are a better politician than I thought."

" Ah, no ! " cried Henri, " it cannot be that."

" So much the worse."

" Come, come ! " and they entered the duke's chamber. The window was open, and a crowd had assembled and was gazing at the rope ladder still suspended from the balcony. Henri grew pale as a corpse.

" Eh, my son," said Chicot, " you are not yet so *blasé* as I thought."

" Fled ! escaped ! " said Henri, in such thundering

tones that all the gentlemen turned round. The king's eyes flashed as his hand sought the hilt of his sword.

Schomberg tore his hair ; Maugiron and Quélus struck their heads and faces. As to D'Epernon, he had disappeared under the specious pretext of going in pursuit of the Duc d'Anjou. The sight of the martyrdom which, in their despair, his favorites were inflicting on themselves, suddenly quieted the king.

" Hey ! gently my sons ! " he said, holding on to Maugiron.

" No, *mordieu* ! I will kill myself ! " said Maugiron, preparing to strike his head against the wall.

" Help me while I hold him, " cried Henri.

" Ho, friend ! " said Chicot, " there is a pleasanter death than that. Run your sword through your body."

" Hold your tongue, you brute ! " said Henri, with tears in his eyes. During this time Quélus was bruising his cheeks.

" Oh, Quélus, my child, " said Henri, " you will look like Schomberg when he had been dipped in the vat of indigo ! You will be horrible."

Quélus stopped.

Schomberg alone continued to tear his hair and weep from rage.

" Schomberg, Schomberg ! a little reason, I beg ! "

" I shall go mad ! "

" Pshaw ! " said Chicot.

" It is, indeed, a terrible misfortune, and you must preserve your reason, Schomberg. Yes, it is a horrible misfortune ; I am lost ! This means civil war in my kingdom. Ah, who furnished the ladder ? *Par la mordieu* ! I will hang the whole city ! " A great terror spread among the spectators. " Where is the guilty one ? " continued Henri. " Ten thousand crowns to the one who will tell me his name, and one hundred thousand to whomsoever will bring him to me, dead or alive."

" Who can it be if not some Angevin ? " cried Maugiron.

" *Pardieu* ! you are right, " cried Henri. " Ah, the Angevins, *mordieu* ! they shall pay for it."

As if that word had been a spark lighting a train of powder, a frightful explosion of cries and threats broke out against the Angevins.

“ Oh, yes, the Angevins ! ” cried Quélus.

“ Where are they ? ” roared Schomberg.

“ Rip them open ! ” vociferated Maugiron.

“ A hundred gibbets for a hundred Angevins,” resumed the king.

Chicot could not remain silent in this universal fury ; he drew his sword, and striking right and left with the flat side, he attacked the favorites and beat the walls.

“ Oh, *ventre de biche !* oh, noble rage ! ah, damnation to the Angevins, *mordieu !* ” he repeated, as he glared about him.

This cry, “ Death to the Angevins ! ” was heard throughout the city, as the cry of the Hebrew mothers was heard throughout Rama.

Henri had disappeared. He had thought of his mother, and slipping out of the room without saying a word, had gone to see Catherine, whom he had somewhat neglected of late. She, apparently indifferent, awaited some suitable occasion which would again bring her policy to the front.

When Henri entered, she was half lying in a large arm-chair, and with her fat, yellowish cheeks, her bright staring eyes, her plump, pale hands, she resembled a wax statue of meditation rather than a living creature. But at the news of François’ escape, which Henri announced without any preparation whatever, filled as he was with anger and hatred, the statue seemed suddenly awake, though she merely leaned a little further back and shook her head without speaking.

“ Well, mother, do you not speak ? ” asked Henri. “ Does not this flight of your son seem to you criminal, and worthy of punishment ? ”

“ My dear son, liberty is well worth a crown ; and remember that I, too, advised you to escape when you could reach that crown.”

“ Mother, I am insulted.”

Catherine shrugged her shoulders.

“ He braves me.”

“ Oh, no ; he saves himself, that is all.”

“ Ah,” said Henri, “ see how you take my part ! ”

“ What do you mean, my son ? ”

“ I mean that feelings grow dull with age ; I say— ”

He stopped.

“ What are you saying ? ” resumed Catherine, with her usual calmness.

“ I say that you no longer love me as you did.”

“ You are mistaken,” said Catherine, with increasing coldness, “ you are still my beloved son ; but the one of whom you complain is also my son.”

“ Ah, a truce to moral sentiments, madame,” said Henri, furiously ; “ we know their value.”

“ Ah, you should know it better than any, my son, for with you my moral has always been weakness.”

“ And as this is the time to repent, you repent.”

“ I felt that we would come to that, my son,” said Catherine, “ therefore I remained silent.”

“ Adieu, madame, adieu. I know what I have to do since even my mother has no compassion for me ; I shall find advisers capable of feeling for me and helping me in this case.”

“ Go, my son,” quietly replied the Florentine. “ May God guide your counsellors ; they will need His assistance to aid you in this strait,” and she let him go without a gesture, without saying a word to keep him.

“ Adieu, madame,” repeated Henri, but he stopped near the door.

“ Adieu, Henri,” said the queen. “ I do not pretend to advise you,—you do not need me, I know,—but beg your counsellors to think well before they advise, and even better before they act.”

“ Oh, yes,” said Henri, taking advantage of this not to go away, “ the position is difficult, is it not, madame ? ”

“ Very grave, Henri,” said Catherine, slowly raising her hands and eyes to heaven. The king, struck by the expression of his mother’s eyes, returned to her.

"Who are those who planned his escape? Have you any idea?" he asked.

Catherine did not reply.

"I think it was the Angevins," continued the king.

Catherine smiled that fine smile which always showed in her the superior and ever watchful mind.

"The Angevins?" she repeated.

"You do not believe it," said Henri, "yet every one does."

Catherine again shrugged her shoulders.

"The others may believe that,—but you, my son?"

"What do you mean, madame? I beg you to explain."

"Why should I?"

"To enlighten me."

"Enlighten you! Come, Henri, I am only an old woman in her dotage, whose only influence lies in her prayers and repentance."

"No, speak, speak, mother, I am listening. Oh, you are still, and will always be, the cleverest of us all."

"It is useless, I have only the ideas of another century, and the distrustfulness of old age. That I should still be able to offer you advice,—impossible, my son."

"Very well, mother, keep your advice and deprive me of your assistance. But within an hour, I shall hang all the Angevins in Paris."

"Hang all the Angevins!" exclaimed Catherine, with the amazement of superior minds when something extraordinary is said before them.

"Yes, hang, slay, massacre, burn. At this very moment my friends are scouring the city to break the bones of those cursed rebels!"

"Let them beware, unhappy man!" cried Catherine, carried away by the gravity of the situation. "They would ruin themselves,—that is nothing,—but they would also ruin you."

"How so?"

"Blind!" murmured Catherine. "Will kings eternally have eyes not to see?" And she clasped her hands.

"Kings are kings only on condition that they will

avenge the injuries inflicted on them ; because in that case vengeance is justice ; and in this case, my whole kingdom will rise to avenge me."

" Foolish child ! "

" Why so ? "

" Do you think that men like Bussy, Antraguet, Livarot, and Ribeirac can be hanged, burned, or slain without causing rivers of blood to flow ? "

" No matter, provided they are killed."

" Yes, no doubt if they are killed. Show them to me dead, and by Notre-Dame ! I will say that you did right. But they will not be killed, they will raise the standard of revolt, and draw their swords,—a thing they would not have done for François,—and your kingdom will rise in arms not for you but against you."

" But if I do not avenge myself they will think I am afraid."

" Did any one ever say I was afraid ? " asked Catherine, frowning, and biting her thin red lips.

" Yet, if it is the Angevins, they deserve punishment."

" Yes, but it was not they."

" Who could it be if not my brother's friends ? "

" It is not your brother's friends, for he has none."

" But who is it ? "

" Your enemy."

" Which one ? "

" My son, you have never had but one, as your brother Charles never had but one,—who is the same as mine, always the same."

" You mean Henri de Navarre ? "

" Yes."

" He is not in Paris."

" Eh, do you know who is or who is not in Paris ? Do you know something ? Have you eyes and ears ? Have you any one around you who sees and hears ? No, you are all deaf and blind."

" Henri de Navarre ! " repeated the king.

" My son, in every disappointment you meet with, in every misfortune that happens to you, the author of

which is unknown, do not seek, hesitate, or inquire ; that is useless. Say, ‘ It is Henri de Navarre,’ and you are sure to be right. Strike on the side where he is, for that is the right side to strike. Oh, that man, that man ! he is the sword suspended by God over the house of Valois.”

“ Then you think I ought to countermand the order about the Angevins ? ”

“ At once ! ” cried Catherine, “ without losing a minute or a second. Hasten, it may now be too late ; recall your orders ; go, or you are lost.”

And seizing her son by the arm, she pushed him to the floor with incredible force and energy. Henri rushed out of the Louvre to try and assemble his friends, but he found only Chicot sitting on a stone and drawing geometrical figures on the sand.

CHAPTER LXIII.

HOW CHICOT AND THE QUEEN-MOTHER BEING OF THE SAME OPINION, THE KING BEGAN TO AGREE WITH THEM.

HENRI looked at the Gascon, who seemed to have made up his mind not to turn around, even if Paris were taken by storm.

“ Ah, wretch ! ” he said, in a thundering voice, “ is this how you defend your king ? ”

“ I defend him after my own fashion, which I consider a good one.”

“ A good one, indeed ! ”

“ I maintain it, and I prove it ! ”

“ I am curious to see this proof.”

“ It is easy ; but first of all, we have committed a great blunder.”

“ In doing what ? ”

“ In doing what we have done.”

“ Ah, ah ! ” said Henri, struck by the agreement between these two minds who had had no communication.

“ Yes,” replied Chicot, “ your friends are howling through the city, ‘ Death to the Angevins ! ’ and now that I reflect upon it, I find it was never proved that the Angevins had anything to do with the case. As I said, your friends, in crying through the town ‘ Death to the Angevins ! ’ will simply raise that nice little civil war of which MM. de Guise are so greatly in need, and which they could not raise of themselves. Now at this moment Henri, your friends are either dead—which would not displease me, I confess, but which would cause you sorrow—or else they have driven all the Angevins from the city—which would greatly displease you, but would delight that dear M. d’Anjou.”

“ *Mordieu !* ” cried the king, “ do you think that matters are already so bad as that ? ”

“ If not a little worse.”

“ But all this does not explain what you are doing here on this stone.”

“ I am doing very important work, my son.”

“ What is it ? ”

“ I am tracing a plan of all the provinces that will rise in rebellion at your brother’s call, and I am counting up the number of men that each one will furnish to the revolt.”

“ Chicot, Chicot,” said the king, “ am I only surrounded by birds of ill-omen ? ”

“ The owl sings at night, my son, because that is his hour. Now, it is dark, Henriquet,—so dark, in fact, that one might mistake night for day ; and I sing what you ought to hear. Look ! ”

“ At what ? ”

“ At my map, and judge. First we have Anjou, which rather resembles a pie,—you see ? That is where your brother has taken refuge, so I have given it the first place. Anjou, well managed by your master of the hounds Monsoreau and your friend Bussy, can alone furnish ten thousand men to your brother.”

“ You think so ? ”

“ That is the minimum. Let us pass on to Guyenne :

here it is, a figure like a calf walking on one leg. Well, you must not be surprised to find some malcontents in Guyenne. It is an old focus of revolt, and the English have only just left it. Guyenne will be quick to rise, not against you, but against France. You can count on eight thousand men from there ; that is little, but you may be sure they are well disciplined and trained troops. Then to the left of Guyenne, we have Béarn and Navarre, —these two divisions, which resemble an ape on the back of an elephant. Navarre has been greatly cut up, but, with Béarn, it still has a population of about three or four hundred thousand men. Suppose that Béarn and Navarre, pressed by Henri, should furnish five per cent of their population, that will be sixteen thousand men. Let us therefore recapitulate : ten thousand for Anjou."

And Chicot continued to draw the numbers on the sand with his stick.

"Anjou	10,000	"	10,000
Guyenne	8,000	"	8,000
Béarn and Navarre	16,000	"	16,000
Total			34,000"

" You think," said Henri, " that Navarre will form an alliance with my brother ? "

" Pardieu ! "

" Do you think he had anything to do with his escape ? "

Chicot looked straight at the king.

" Henriquet," he said, " that was not your own idea."

" Why not ? "

" It is too clever, my son."

" No matter whose it is ; I question you : answer. Do you think Henri of Navarre had anything to do with my brother's escape ? "

" Well, I heard in the Rue de la Ferronnerie, a ' *Ventre saint-gris* ! ' which seems to me rather conclusive."

" You heard a ' *ventre saint-gris* ? ' " cried the king.

" Yes," said Chicot, " and I have only just remembered it."

" So he was in Paris ? "

"I believe so."

"What can make you believe it?"

"My eyes."

"You saw the King of Navarre?"

"Yes."

"And you did not come and tell me that my enemies had braved me even here in my capital."

"A man is a gentleman or he is not," said Chicot; "if he is a gentleman, he is not a spy,—that's all."

Henri became thoughtful.

"So," he said, "Anjou and Béarn, my brother François and my cousin Henri."

"Without counting the three Guises."

"What! do you think they will join the alliance?"

"Thirty-four thousand men on one side," said Chicot counting on his fingers,—"ten for Anjou, eight for Guyenne, sixteen for Béarn, plus twenty or twenty-five thousand under the orders of M. de Guise, as lieutenant general of your armies; total, fifty-nine thousand men. Let us reduce them to fifty thousand on account of gout, rheumatism, sciatica, and other infirmities. It is still, as you see, my son, a very nice total."

"But Henri de Navarre and the Duc de Guise are enemies."

"That will not prevent their uniting against you, even if they should exterminate each other after they have exterminated you."

"You are right, Chicot; my mother is right; you are both right. You must prevent a scandal; help me to assemble the Swiss."

"Ah, yes, the Swiss! Quélus has taken them."

"My guards."

"Schomberg has taken them."

"But my own attendants."

"They have gone with Maugiron."

"What!" cried Henri, "without my orders?"

"And since when do you give orders, Henri? Ah, in the matter of processions and flagellations, I do not say you are not given full sway over your own skin and even

hat of others. But all questions of war and government,—why, they concern M. de Schomberg, M. de Quélus, and M. de Maugiron. As to D'Epernon, I say nothing about him, since he is hiding."

"*Mordieu !*" said Henri, "is this the way that things are going on ?"

"Allow me to tell you, my son," replied Chicot, "that you are very late in perceiving that you are only the seventh or eighth king of your kingdom."

Henri bit his lip and stamped his foot.

"Eh," said Chicot, trying to peer through the darkness.

"What is the matter ?" asked the king.

"*Ventre de biche !* here are your men, Henri," and he pointed out to the king three or four horsemen who galloped up, followed at a distance by some other horsemen and a great many men on foot. The horsemen were about to enter the Louvre without having noticed the two men standing near the ditch, half concealed in the dim light.

"Schomberg !" cried the king, "Schomberg, come here !"

"Who calls me ?" said Schomberg.

"Come, my child, come."

Schomberg thought he recognized the voice, and drew near.

"Eh," he said, "God damn me ! it is the king."

"In person ; I was running after you, and not knowing where to join you, I was impatiently waiting. What have you done ?"

"What have we done ?" asked a second horseman, approaching.

"Ah, come, Quélus," said the king, "and do not go off again in this way without my permission."

"There is no need of it," said a third, whom the king recognized as Maugiron ; "all is over."

"All is over ?" repeated the king.

"Heaven be praised !" said D'Epernon, suddenly appearing. "Hosanna !" cried Chicot, raising his hands to heaven.

"Then you have killed them?" asked the king; and he added in a low voice, "after all, the dead do not return."

"Have you killed them?" asked Chicot. "Ah, if you have done that, there is nothing to say."

"We did not have that trouble," said Schomberg. "The cowards had flown away like a flock of pigeons; we scarcely had time to cross our swords with them."

Henri grew pale.

"With whom?" he asked.

"With Antraguet."

"I hope you killed that one."

"On the contrary, he killed one of Quélus' valets."

"They were, then, on their guard?"

"*Parbleu!* I should think they were," cried Chicot. "You cry, 'Death to the Angevins,' you fire cannon, ring bells, and you expect honest people to be more deaf than you are foolish."

"Oh," murmured the king, "this means a civil war!"

Quélus started at these words.

"The devil!" he said, "that is true."

"Ah, you are beginning to see," said Chicot; "how fortunate! Here are MM. de Schomberg and Maugiron who do not even suspect the fact."

"We reserve ourselves," said Schomberg, "to defend the person and crown of his Majesty."

"Eh, *pardieu!*" said Chicot, "for that we have M. de Crillon, who makes less noise but who is worth quite as much."

"But you, Monsieur Chicot, who have been criticising us right and left,—you thought like the rest of us, and cried out as we did," said Quélus.

"I?" said Chicot.

"Certainly, and you were beating the walls and crying out, 'Death to the Angevins!'"

"With me," said Chicot, "it is a very different matter. I am a fool and every one knows it, but you are clever men."

"Come, gentlemen," said Henri, "peace; we shall soon have enough war."

"What are your Majesty's orders?" asked Quélus.

"That you should make the same efforts to calm the people that you made to excite them; that you should bring back to the palace the Swiss, guards, and members of my household and close the gates, so that to-morrow the *bourgeois* may take the whole thing for a drunken brawl."

The young men went away rather crestfallen, and transmitted the king's orders to the officers who had accompanied them. As for Henri, he returned to his mother, who, anxious and gloomy, was busy giving orders.

"Well," she asked, "what has taken place?"

"What you had foreseen."

"Have they fled?"

"Alas! yes."

"What else?"

"Nothing. That seems to me quite sufficient."

"The city?"

"Is excited; but that does not trouble me, I have it under control."

"Yes," said Catherine, "but the provinces?"

"They will rise in rebellion," replied Henri.

"What do you intend to do?"

"I see but one thing."

"What is that?"

"To accept the position openly."

"How so?"

"I give my orders to the colonels and to my guards, I arm the militia, summon the troops from La Charité, and march against Anjou."

"And M. de Guise?"

"Well, M. de Guise! I shall have him arrested if necessary."

"And you think violent measures will succeed?"

"What am I to do?"

Catherine looked down and reflected for a moment.

“ All that you propose is impossible, my son.”

“ Ah,” cried Henri, “ am I so badly inspired to-day ? ”

“ No, but you are agitated ; calm yourself and we shall see.”

“ Well, mother, think for me ; we must act and do something.”

“ You see, my son, I was giving orders.”

“ What orders ? ”

“ For the departure of an ambassador.”

“ To whom shall we send one ? ”

“ To your brother.”

“ An ambassador to this traitor ! You humiliate me.”

“ This is not the time for pride,” said Catherine, severely.

“ An ambassador who will ask for peace ? ”

“ And even buy it if necessary.”

“ For what advantage, *mon Dieu* ! ”

“ Eh, my son,” said the Florentine, “ if only to give us later on the power of securing those who escaped to make war. Did you not say a while ago that you would like to secure their persons ? ”

“ Oh, I would give four provinces of my kingdom for that,—one for each man ! ”

“ Who wishes the end, wishes the means,” replied Catherine, in a voice which stirred the desire for hatred and vengeance in Henri’s heart.

“ I think you are right, mother. But whom shall we send ? ”

“ Seek among your friends.”

“ I do not see a single man to whom I could entrust such a mission.”

“ Give it to a woman, then.”

“ To a woman ! Mother, would you consent ? ”

“ My son, I am very old and weak, and death may perhaps await me on my return ; but I shall make this journey so rapidly that I shall arrive in Angers before your brother and his friends have had time to understand all their power.”

“ Oh, mother, my good mother ! ” cried Henri,

effusively, kissing her hands, "you are ever my support, my benefactress, my providence!"

"That means that I am still Queen of France," murmured Catherine, and the glance which rested on her son contained as much pity as tenderness.

CHAPTER LXIV.

IN WHICH IT IS PROVED THAT GRATITUDE WAS ONE OF
M. DE SAINT-LUC'S VIRTUES.

ON the day following the one when M. de Monsoreau's dismal expression had obtained for him the Duc d'Anjou's permission to retire, that gentleman rose early and descended into the palace courtyard. His object was to find the groom to whom he had already spoken, and obtain from him, if possible, some information concerning Roland's habits. The count succeeded. He entered beneath a vast shed where forty magnificent horses were devouring the best oats and hay of Anjoy. Monsoreau's first glance went in search of Roland. The horse was in its place, and eating with appetite. The second glance was for the groom.

He recognized him standing near the wall and watching the horses as they ate.

"Eh, my friend," said the count, "are Monseigneur's horses taught to return to their stable alone?"

"No, Monsieur le Comte," replied the groom. "Why do you ask this question?"

"About Roland."

"Ah, he returned alone yesterday. But that does not surprise me; he is a very intelligent animal."

"Yes," said Monsoreau, "I noticed that. Has he done so before?"

"No, monsieur; he is generally used by Monseigneur the Duc d'Anjou, who is an excellent rider, not easily unhorsed."

" Roland did not throw me," said the count, unwilling that even a groom should suspect him of such bad horsemanship. " Without having Monseigneur's skill, I am a good rider. No, I had tied him to a tree while I entered a house ; when I returned, he had disappeared. I thought he had been stolen, or that some gentleman had played me a trick by carrying him away. That was my reason for asking how he had returned."

" He came alone, as the major-domo had the honor of telling Monsieur le Comte yesterday."

" That is strange," said Monsoreau. He paused for a moment, then changing the conversation, " Does Monseigneur often ride this horse ? " he asked.

" He rode him nearly every day until the arrival of the equipages."

" Did his Highness come in late last night ? "

" About one hour before you, Monsieur le Comte."

" What horse did the duke ride ? Was it not a bay with white stockings and a star on its forehead ? "

" No, monsieur," said the groom ; " he rode Isolin, whom you see here."

" Was there no one in the prince's escort riding a horse answering to the description I gave you ? "

" I know no one having such a horse."

" Very well," said Monsoreau, impatient at the lack of success of his discoveries. " Thank you. Saddle Roland for me."

" Monsieur le Comte desires Roland ? "

" Yes. Has the prince given any orders against it ? "

" No, monsieur ; on the contrary, I was told to say that the whole stable is at your disposal."

There was no way of showing anger against a prince so full of delicate attentions. Monsoreau nodded to the groom, who immediately saddled the horse. When this was done, and the groom had led Roland to the count,—

" Listen," said the latter, as he took the bridle, " and answer me."

" Certainly, monsieur."

" What are your wages for the year ? "

"Twenty crowns, monsieur."

"Would you like to earn ten times that sum at one stroke?"

"*Pardieu!* but how?"

"Find out who rode yesterday a horse answering to the description I gave you."

"Ah, monsieur!" said the groom; "this is a very difficult task. So many gentlemen come to visit his Highness."

"Yes, but two hundred crowns is a large sum to earn when you have no risks to run."

"I know it, Monsieur le Comte, and I shall do my best."

"Come," said the count; "I see you are willing. Here are ten crowns as an encouragement. You see you will not have lost everything."

"Thank you, Monsieur le Comte."

"Well, tell the prince that I have gone to reconnoitre the woods for the chase."

The count had scarcely uttered these words, when he heard footsteps behind him. He turned round.

"M. de Bussy!" he cried.

"Eh, good-morning, M. de Monsoreau," said Bussy. "You, in Angers; what a miracle!"

"And you, monsieur,—I thought you were ill."

"So I am," said Bussy. "My physician orders absolute rest, and I have not left the city for a week. Ah, ah, it seems you are about to ride Roland. I sold him to M. le Duc d'Anjou, who is so pleased that he rides him nearly every day."

Monsoreau turned pale.

"Yes," he said, "I can understand that. Roland is an excellent horse."

"You are very fortunate in making so good a choice from the first," said Bussy.

"Oh, this is not my first acquaintance with him. I rode him yesterday."

"Which made you wish to try him again to-day?"

"Yes," replied the count.

“ Pardon me,” said Bussy, “ did you not speak of preparing a chase ? ”

“ The prince has expressed that wish.”

“ I am told there are a great many deer in the vicinity.”

“ A great many.”

“ And which side will you drive the animal ? ”

“ In the neighborhood of Méridor.”

“ Ah ! ” said Bussy, growing pale in spite of himself.

“ Will you accompany me ? ” asked Monsoreau.

“ No, I thank you,” replied Bussy. “ I am going to bed ; I feel the fever coming on.”

“ Ah,” cried a ringing voice from the stable door ; “ here is M. de Bussy, up without my permission.”

“ Le Haudoin ! ” said Bussy ; “ now, I am sure to be scolded. Adieu, count ; I recommend Roland to you.”

“ Have no fear.”

Bussy walked away, and Monsoreau mounted the horse.

“ What is the matter ? ” asked Rémy. “ You are so pale that I believe you are really ill.”

“ Do you know where he is going ? ”

“ No.”

“ To Méridor.”

“ Well, did you expect him to avoid it ? ”

“ What will happen, *mon Dieu !* after what took place yesterday ? ”

“ Madame de Monsoreau will deny.”

“ But he saw her.”

“ She will insist that he is dreaming.”

“ Diane will not have the strength.”

“ Oh, M. de Bussy, is it possible that you do not know women any better ? ”

“ Rémy, I feel very ill.”

“ I should think so. Go home. I prescribe for this morning—”

“ What ? ”

“ A fowl, a slice of ham, and a bisque.”

“ But I am not hungry.”

“ All the more reason for me to order you to eat.”

“ Rémy, I have a feeling that this wretch will make a

scene at Méridor. I really ought to have accompanied him as he proposed."

" What for ? "

" To sustain Diane."

" Madame Diane will sustain herself unaided ; and as you must do the same, I beg you to come. Besides, you must not be seen up and about. Why did you go out notwithstanding my injunctions ? "

" I was too uneasy and could stand it no longer."

Rémy shrugged his shoulders, led Bussy away, and having closed all the doors, seated him before a well served table while M. de Monsoreau rode out of Angers through the same gate as the day before. The count had his object in wishing to ride Roland a second time : he wished to ascertain whether chance or habit had led the animal to carry him to the park wall. Therefore, as he left the palace, he dropped the reins ; Roland did exactly what his rider expected. He was no sooner out of the gates than he turned to the left, then to the right ; M. de Monsoreau allowed him to follow his own direction, and passed through the path, then the fields, and through the forest. As Roland approached Méridor, his speed increased, his trot became a gallop, and at the end of forty minutes, M. de Monsoreau found himself before the wall at the very spot he had reached the day before. Only silence and solitude reigned ; there was no horse around. M. de Monsoreau dismounted ; but this time, to escape the risk of having to walk home, he slipped Roland's bridle over his arm and climbed up the wall.

But all was silent within and without the park. The long alleys extended before him and a few deer gambolled on the green sward.

The count concluded that it would be useless to waste any more time watching people who had, no doubt, been frightened into giving up their meetings, or into selecting another spot. He accordingly mounted his horse, took a little path, and within fifteen minutes had reached the gate.

The baron was busy whipping his dogs to keep them in

good training when the count passed over the drawbridge. He caught sight of his son-in-law and advanced ceremoniously to meet him. Diane, seated beneath a magnificent sycamore, was reading Marot's poems; Gertrude, her faithful attendant, was embroidering beside her.

The count, after having greeted the baron, perceived the two women. He dismounted and approached them. Diane rose, advanced to meet him, and bowed.

"What calmness, or rather what perfidy!" murmured the count. "What a tempest I shall cause on these sleeping waters!"

A footman approached; the master of the hounds threw him the bridle of his horse, then turning to Diane,—

"Madame," he said, "will you kindly grant me a few moments' conversation?"

"Willingly, monsieur," replied Diane.

"Will you do us the honor to remain at the castle, Monsieur le Comte?" asked the baron.

"Yes, monsieur, until to-morrow at least."

The baron went away to see that his son-in-law's room was prepared according to all the laws of hospitality. Monsoreau invited Diane to resume her seat, and took the chair that Gertrude had occupied; then with a look which would have intimidated the bravest men,—

"Madame," he said, "who was with you in the park last evening?"

Diane looked at her husband with a clear and limpid glance.

"At what time, monsieur?" she asked, in a voice from which she had succeeded in banishing all emotion.

"At six o'clock."

"Where?"

"Near the copse."

"It must have been one of my friends, and not I, who was walking in that part."

"It was you, madame," insisted Monsoreau.

"How do you know?" asked Diane.

Monsoreau, taken by surprise, did not have a word to say ; but anger soon followed this amazement.

“ Tell me the name of that man.”

“ Of what man ? ”

“ The one who was walking with you.”

“ I cannot tell you as I was not walking.”

“ It was you, I tell you ! ” cried Monsoreau, stamping his foot on the ground.

“ You are mistaken, monsieur,” coldly replied Diane.

“ How dare you deny that I saw you.”

“ Ah, it was you, monsieur ? ”

“ Yes, madame. How dare you deny it was you when there is no other woman at Méridor ? ”

“ You are again mistaken, monsieur, for Jeanne de Brissac is here.”

“ Madame de Saint-Luc ? ”

“ Yes, Madame de Saint-Luc, my friend.”

“ And M. de Saint-Luc ? ”

“ He does not leave his wife, as you know ; theirs was a love match. You saw M. and Madame de Saint-Luc.”

“ It was not M. de Saint-Luc nor Madame de Saint-Luc. It was you,—for I recognized you,—with a man whom I do not know, but whom I shall know, I swear to you.”

“ So you persist in saying it was I, monsieur ? ”

“ I tell you I recognized you, and heard your scream.”

“ When you have recovered your senses, monsieur,” said Diane, “ I shall consent to listen to you ; but for the present, I think I had better retire.”

“ No, madame,” said Monsoreau, holding Diane by the arm, “ you shall remain.”

“ Monsieur,” said Diane, “ here are M. and Madame de Saint-Luc. I hope you will control yourself before them.”

Indeed, Saint-Luc and his wife were seen approaching, summoned by the dinner-bell, which had just been rung, as if they only had waited for Monsoreau to take their places at table. Both recognized the count, and guessing

that their presence would perhaps relieve Diane from an unpleasant situation, they quickly approached.

Madame de Saint-Luc bowed to Monsoreau, and her husband cordially extended his hand. All three exchanged a few remarks, and Saint-Luc, pushing his wife towards the count, offered his arm to Diane.

They went to the house.

Nine o'clock was the dinner hour at the Château de Méridor ; this was an old custom from the reign of King Louis XII. to which the baron still adhered.

M. de Monsoreau was placed between Saint-Luc and his wife. Diane, separated from her husband by a skilful manoeuvre of her friend, sat between Saint-Luc and the baron.

The conversation was general and turned naturally on the arrival of the king's brother in Angers and on the movement which this arrival would cause in the province. Monsoreau would have liked to converse on other topics, but he could not direct the conversation. Not that Saint Luc refused to answer him ; on the contrary, he cajoled the furious husband with his wittiest sallies, and Diane, who could thus remain silent, thanked her friend with eloquent glances.

"That Saint-Luc is a fool who chatters like a magpie," said the count to himself ; "here is the man from whom I shall worm the secret I wish to know."

M. de Monsoreau did not know Saint-Luc, having entered the court just as the latter left it. With this belief, he joined the young man, thus increasing Diane's joy and giving satisfaction on all sides. Besides, Saint Luc gave Madame de Monsoreau glances which meant,—

"Do not be worried, madame ; I have a plan."

In the next chapter we shall see M. de Saint-Luc's plan.

CHAPTER LXV.

THE PROJECT OF M. DE SAINT-LUC.

WHEN the meal was over, Monsoreau took his new friend by the arm and led him out of the castle.

" Do you know," he said, " that I am very happy to find you here; the solitude of Méridor frightened me."

" Why," said Saint-Luc, " have you not your wife? As for me, in such company, I would find a desert too populous."

" I do not deny that," replied Monsoreau, biting his lips, " yet—"

" Yet what?"

" Yet I am very glad to find you here."

" Monsieur," said Saint-Luc, picking his teeth with a little gold sword, " you are really very polite; but I shall never believe that you could fear *ennui* with such a wife and in such a beautiful country."

" Pshaw!" said Monsoreau, " I have spent half of my life in these woods."

" All the more reason for you not to be bored," said Saint-Luc. " It seems to me that the more we see the forests, the more we love them. See this admirable park; know I shall be in despair when I have to leave it. Unfortunately, I fear this will soon happen."

" Why should you leave it?"

" Eh, monsieur, is man master of his fate? He is like the leaf of a tree, blown about by the winds without even knowing whither. You are happy."

" In what way?"

" In living beneath these beautiful trees."

" Oh," said Monsoreau, " I shall probably not remain here very long."

" What makes you say that? I think you are mistaken."

" No," said Monsoreau. " I am not such a fanatical

admirer of Nature, and I distrust this park which you admire so much."

" What ? " asked Saint-Luc.

" Yes," repeated Monsoreau.

" You say you distrust this park ? In what way ? "

" Because I do not consider it safe."

" Not safe ! Really ? " said Saint-Luc, surprised. " Ah, I understand,—on account of its isolated position."

" No, not exactly on that account, for I presume you have visitors at Méridor."

" Faith ! no," said Saint-Luc, with perfect simplicity. " not a soul."

" Ah, really ? "

" As I had the honor of telling you."

" What ! have you no visitors from time to time ? "

" Not since I have been here."

" Not a single gentleman from the brilliant court at Angers ? "

" Not one."

" Impossible ! "

" It is so, nevertheless."

" Ah, fie ! you slander the Angevin gentlemen."

" I do not know whether I slander them, but the devil take me if I have so much as spied one of their plumes."

" Then I am wrong on that point."

" Yes, absolutely wrong. Let us return to what you were just saying about the park being unsafe. Are there any bears ? "

" Oh, no."

" Wolves ? "

" No."

" Robbers ? "

" Perhaps. Tell me, my dear monsieur, Madame de Saint-Luc is very pretty, is she not ? "

" Why, yes."

" Does she often walk in the park ? "

" Very often ; she is like me and adores the country. But why do you ask this question ? "

" When she walks do you always accompany her ? "

"Always," said Saint-Luc.

"Nearly always," said the count.

"What the devil are you driving at?"

"Oh, *mon Dieu!* nothing,—or almost nothing."

"I am listening."

"I have been told—"

"What? Speak."

"You will not be angry?"

"I never get angry."

"Besides, between husbands, these confidences are right. I have been told that a man was seen wandering in the park."

"A man?"

"Yes."

"Who came for my wife?"

"Oh, I do not say that."

"You would be very wrong not to say it, my dear M. de Monsoreau; this is most interesting. And who saw him? Pray tell me."

"Why should I?"

"We are talking, are we not? Well, we might as well talk about that as anything else. You say that this man came for Madame de Saint-Luc. How very queer!"

"Listen, and I shall confess the whole thing; I do not think it was really for Madame de Saint-Luc."

"And for whom, then?"

"I fear that it was for Diane."

"Ah," said Saint-Luc, "I would like that better."

"What! you would like that better?"

"No doubt; you know that husbands are the most selfish race of beings. Each one for himself, and God for all."

"Or rather, the devil," added Monsoreau.

"So you think a man entered?"

"I do better than believe it,—I saw him."

"You saw a man in the park?"

"Yes," said Monsoreau.

"Alone?"

“ With Madame de Monsoreau.”

“ When ? ”

“ Yesterday.”

“ Where ? ”

“ Here, to the left.” As Monsoreau had conducted his companion to the copse, he was able to point out the spot.

“ Ah,” said Saint-Luc, “ here is a wall in very bad condition ; I must tell the baron.”

“ And whom do you suspect ? ”

“ Whom do I suspect ? ”

“ Yes,” said the count.

“ Of doing what ? ”

“ Of climbing over the wall to come in the park and talk with my wife.”

Saint-Luc seemed buried in a profound meditation ; the result of which Monsoreau awaited with impatience.

“ Well ? ” he said.

“ Well,” said Saint-Luc, “ I only see—”

“ Whom ? ” quickly asked the count.

“ You,” said Saint-Luc, facing him.

“ Are you jesting, my dear M. de Saint-Luc,” said the count, petrified.

“ Why, no. In the early part of my marriage I did such things. Why should you not do the same ? ”

“ Come, you do not wish to answer me ; confess it, my dear friend, and fear nothing. I have courage. Come, help me to discover the man ; you would greatly assist me.”

Saint-Luc scratched his ear.

“ I can only think of you,” he said.

“ A truce to jests ; take the thing seriously, monsieur, for I warn you it is of importance.”

“ You think so ? ”

“ I tell you I am sure.”

“ That is another matter ; but how does this man come ? Do you know ? ”

“ He comes by stealth. *Parbleu !* ”

“ Often ? ”

" I should think so ; his footsteps have left tracks in the soft stone of the wall ; look, now."

" Yes, true."

" Had you never perceived what I have just told you ? "

" Oh," said Saint-Luc, " I suspected it."

" Ah, you see ! " said the count, breathless. " What next ? "

" I never troubled myself : I thought it was you."

" But when I assure you—"

" I believe you, my dear monsieur."

" You believe me ? "

" Yes."

" Well, then ? "

" Then it is some one else."

The master of the hounds glared at Saint-Luc, who was displaying his most coquettish nonchalance.

" Ah ! " he said, in such an angry tone that the young man raised his head.

" I have another idea," said Saint-Luc.

" Really ? "

" Supposing it were—"

" Whom ? "

" No."

" Speak."

" Supposing it were M. le Duc d'Anjou."

" I had thought of him," replied Monsoreau, " but on inquiring, I found that it could not be."

" The duke is very cunning."

" Yes, but it was not he."

" You always tell me that it is not," said Saint-Luc, " and you want me to insist that it is."

" No doubt ; you live in the castle, you ought to know."

" Stop ! " cried Saint-Luc.

" Have you an idea ? "

" Yes ; if it was neither you nor the duke, it must have been me."

" You, Saint-Luc ? "

" Why not ? "

" You come to the park on horseback, when you are already in it ? "

" Eh, *mon Dieu* ! I am such a whimsical creature."

" You would have taken flight on seeing me appear over the wall ? "

" One would fly for less."

" Then you were doing wrong," said the count, losing control of himself.

" I do not say I was not."

" You are laughing at me," cried the count, " and this has been going on for fifteen minutes."

" You are mistaken, monsieur," said Saint-Luc, drawing his watch and looking at Monsoreau with a fixity which made the latter shudder in spite of himself. " It has been going on for twenty minutes."

" You insult me, monsieur ! " cried the count.

" And do you imagine, monsieur, that you are not insulting me with your pointed questions ? "

" Ah, I see it all clearly, now."

" What a miracle at ten o'clock in the morning ! Well, tell me what you see."

" I see that you have an understanding with the traitor and coward whom I came near killing yesterday."

" *Pardieu* ! " said Saint-Luc, " he is my friend."

" In that case, I will kill you in his stead."

" What ! in your own house, so suddenly, without warning ? "

" Do you expect me to stand on ceremony to punish a wretch ? " cried the exasperated count.

" Ah, M. de Monsoreau," replied Saint-Luc, " how ill-bred you are ! Living among wild beasts has spoiled your manners. *Fie !*"

" But do you not see that I am furious ? " shrieked the count, placing himself before Saint-Luc with folded arms and features contracted by the expression of the frightful despair in his heart.

" Yes, *mordieu* ! I see it, and fury is not in the least becoming to you ; you are horrible to behold, my dear M. de Monsoreau."

The count, beside himself, placed his hand on his sword.
 "Ah, take care," said Saint-Luc, "you are provoking me. I beg you to see that I am perfectly calm."

"Yes, fop, coxcomb, I do provoke you!"

"Take the trouble to pass over to the other side of the wall, M. de Monsoreau; there we shall be on neutral ground."

"What do I care?" cried the count.

"I care," replied Saint-Luc. "I do not wish to kill you in your own house."

"Very well," said Monsoreau, climbing hastily over the wall.

"Take care! go carefully, count; this stone is loose. Do not hurt yourself. I should be greatly grieved."

And Saint-Luc climbed over.

"Come, be quick!" said the count, drawing his sword.

"As I came to the country for pleasure, I can boast of having had a great deal of amusement," said Saint-Luc, talking to himself as he reached the other side.

CHAPTER LXVI.

IN WHICH M. DE SAINT-LUC SHOWED M. DE MONSOREAU THE THRUST HE HAD LEARNED FROM THE KING.

I. DE MONSOREAU awaited Saint-Luc, sword in hand.

"Are you ready?" he asked.

"Ah," replied Saint-Luc, "you did not take the worst place with your back to the sun."

Monsoreau moved a little to one side.

"This is better," said Saint-Luc; "I shall at least see what I am about."

"Do not spare me," said Monsoreau; "I am in earnest."

"Ah," said Saint-Luc, "do you really wish to kill me?"

"Do I wish it?—oh, yes, I do!"

"Man proposes and God disposes," said Saint-Luc, drawing his sword in turn.

"What are you saying?"

"Look at that tuft of poppies and dandelions."

"Well?"

"Well, I mean to lay you there," and he laughingly placed himself in posture of defence. Monsoreau began the combat furiously, and made several thrusts which Saint-Luc parried with equal agility.

"*Pardieu!* M. de Monsoreau," he said, as he toyed with his enemy's weapon, "you use your sword very skilfully, and any man but Bussy or myself would have been killed by that thrust."

Monsoreau turned pale as he realized what an adversary he had to deal with.

"You are perhaps surprised," said Saint-Luc, "to see how well I use my sword; but the king, who is very fond of me, as you know, took the trouble to give me lessons, and among other things, taught me a thrust which I shall show you presently. I tell you this, because if you are killed, you will have the pleasure of knowing you are killed by the king's method; it will be very flattering to you."

"You are very witty, monsieur," said Monsoreau, exasperated, and dealing a thrust which would have gone through a wall.

"Well, we do our best," modestly replied Saint-Luc, jumping to one side and forcing his antagonist to turn in such a way that he had the sun full in his eyes.

"Ah, ah," he said, "you are just where I wanted to see you, until I put you on another spot. I brought this about very neatly, did I not? I am pleased,—really quite pleased. A while ago you had only fifty chances out of a hundred of being killed, now you have ninety-nine." And with a suppleness, vigor, and rage such as Monsoreau had never seen and which would have seemed impossible in this effeminate young man, Saint-Luc rushed at the master of the hounds, who parried five thrusts, but received the sixth full in the chest.

Monsoreau remained standing for another second, but like an uprooted oak that awaits a breath to know on which side to fall.

"Now," said Saint-Luc, "you have the hundred chances complete; and observe, monsieur, that you will fall on the very tuft I had pointed out to you."

The count's strength suddenly gave way; he stretched out his hands while his eyes grew dim; his knees bent, and he fell on the tuft of poppies, over which his blood flowed.

Saint-Luc quietly wiped his sword and looked at the different tints of the face, which gradually changed from that of a dying man to that of a corpse.

"You have killed me, monsieur," said Monsoreau.

"I tried," replied Saint-Luc; "but now that I see you lying there, ready to die, the devil take me if I am not sorry for what I have done. You are now sacred to me, monsieur. You are horribly jealous, but you were brave."

And satisfied with this funeral oration, Saint-Luc knelt beside Monsoreau, and said to him,—

"Have you any last wish, monsieur? Tell me, and upon my word as a gentleman, it shall be executed. I know that a wounded man is generally thirsty; shall I get you a drink?"

Monsoreau did not reply. He was lying face downwards, biting the grass, and struggling in a pool of blood.

"Poor devil!" said Saint-Luc, rising. "Ah, friendship, thou art a very exacting divinity."

Monsoreau opened his fading eyes, tried to raise his head, and fell back with a hollow groan.

"Come, he is dead," said Saint-Luc. "Let us think no more about him. That is easy to say— In all this I have killed a man. No one will accuse me of wasting my time in the country."

He jumped over the wall and ran through the park to the castle. The first person he saw was Diane; she was conversing with her friend.

"Black will be becoming to her," thought Saint-Luc, as

he approached the charming group formed by the two women.

"Pardon me, madame," he said to Diane, "but I should like to exchange a few words with Madame de Saint-Luc."

"Certainly, my dear guest," replied Madame de Monsoreau. "I shall join my father in the library; when you will have finished with M. de Saint-Luc," she added turning to her friend, "come and join me; I shall be there."

"I shall not be long," said Jeanne, as Diane walked away with a smile. The husband and wife remained alone.

"What is the matter?" asked Jeanne, with her sunniest smile; "you look gloomy, dear husband."

"Yes, yes," replied Saint-Luc.

"What has happened?"

"Oh, *mon Dieu!* an accident."

"To you?" asked Jeanne, in terror.

"Not exactly to me, but to a person who was near me."

"To whom?"

"The one with whom I was walking."

"M. de Monsoreau?"

"Alas! yes. Poor dear man!"

"What has happened to him?"

"I believe he is dead."

"Dead!" cried Jeanne, in an agitation most natural to conceive, "dead!"

"Exactly."

"He who was here just now, talking and looking."

"That is just the cause of his death; he looked, and above all, talked too much."

"Saint-Luc, my friend—" said the young woman seizing her husband's hands.

"What?"

"You are keeping something from me."

"Absolutely nothing, I swear,—not even the spot where he died."

"And where did he die?"

"There, behind the wall, on the very spot where our friend Bussy was in the habit of tying his horse."

"You killed him, Saint-Luc?"

"*Parbleu!* who else can it be? We were only two, and I come back alive to tell you that he is dead. It is not very difficult to guess which of the two killed the other."

"Unhappy man!"

"Well, my dear friend, he provoked me, insulted me, and drew his sword."

"This is horrible, horrible! Poor man!"

"Now," said Saint-Luc, "I was sure of it. You will see that before a week every one will call him Saint Monsoreau."

"But you cannot remain here," cried Jeanne; "you cannot dwell any longer beneath the roof of the man you have killed."

"I said that to myself at once, dearest, and hastened here to ask you to make preparations for our departure."

"He did not wound you, at least?"

"At last; though it comes rather late, this question reconciles me with you. No, I am perfectly whole."

"Then we start—"

"At once. You understand that the accident may be discovered at any moment."

"What accident?" cried Madame de Saint-Luc, coming back to her first thought. "But now, I am hinking, Madame de Monsoreau is a widow."

"That is exactly what I said to myself."

"After having killed him?"

"No, before."

"Then, while I tell her—"

"Spare her feelings."

"How bad you are! While I tell her, saddle the horses yourself as for a ride."

"An excellent idea! You would do well to have a great many of the same kind, dear friend, because I confess that my brain is not so clear as it might be."

"But where are we going?"

“ To Paris.”

“ To Paris ! And the king ? ”

“ The king will have forgotten all ; so many things have occurred since last we met. As there will probably be a war, my place is beside him.”

“ Very well ; let us, then, leave for Paris.”

“ Yes ; but I must have a pen and ink.”

“ To write to whom ? ”

“ To Bussy. You understand that I cannot leave Anjou without telling him why I go.”

“ Of course. You will find everything you need in my room.”

Saint-Luc went upstairs at once, and with a hand which in spite of himself, trembled a little, he wrote the following lines :—

“ DEAR FRIEND,—You will soon hear, by report, of the accident which befell M. de Monsoreau. We had near the old copse a discussion on the causes and effects of crumbling walls, and the objections to horses who find their way home alone. In the heat of the discussion, M. de Monsoreau fell on a tuft of poppies and dandelions in such a manner that he was killed on the spot.—Your friend for life,

SAINT-LUC.

P.S.—As you might find this rather improbable, I shall add that when the accident happened we both held our swords in hand. I leave at once for Paris, with the intention of paying my respects to the king, Anjou notwithstanding, seeming to me very safe after what has occurred.”

Ten minutes later, one of the baron’s servants was on the road to Angers with this letter, while M. and Madam de Saint-Luc went out of the park through a little side-door which opened on a cross-road, leaving Diane very much agitated and embarrassed how to tell the baron about the accident. She had turned away her eyes when Saint-Luc passed.

“ Serve your friends,” said the latter to his wife. “ Men are selfish ; I am the only grateful one.”

CHAPTER LXVII.

THE QUEEN-MOTHER MAKES HER ENTRANCE INTO THE GOOD CITY OF ANGERS, BUT NOT TRIUMPHANTLY.

At the very moment when M. de Monsoreau fell beneath the sword of Saint-Luc, there was a great flourish of trumpets at the gates of Angers, which were closed with the greatest care. The guards, who had been notified, raised the standard, and replied with similar symphonies. It was Catherine de Medicis who was entering Angers with a rather imposing retinue. The arrival was announced to Bussy, who rose from his bed and went to the prince, who immediately got into his. The airs played on the ngevin trumpets were very beautiful ones, but they had not the virtues of those which caused the walls of Jericho to fall : the gates of Angers did not open.

Catherine then leaned out of the litter to show herself to the guards, hoping that the majesty of a royal countenance would have more effect than the sound of trumpets.

The militiamen of Angers saw the queen, and saluted her with courtesy, but the gates remained closed. Catherine sent a gentleman to the barriers and he was received with great courtesy ; but when he demanded the right of entrance for the queen-mother, and insisted that Her Majesty should be received with honor, he was told that Angers being in a state of siege the gates could not be opened without certain indispensable formalities.

The gentleman returned very crestfallen to his mistress, and Catherine uttered these words, which Louis XIV. modified later on in accordance with the proportions taken by royal authority.

“ I shall wait,” she said.

Her gentlemen stood around her, trembling with rage. Finally Bussy, who had spent nearly half an hour lecturing His Highness and giving him a hundred state reasons, such one more peremptory than the last, made up his mind.

He had his horse saddled with gaudy trappings, chose five gentlemen whom he knew to be most disagreeable to the queen-mother, and placing himself at their head, went slowly to meet her Majesty.

Catherine was growing weary, not of waiting, but of plotting vengeance against the authors of this trick. She remembered the Arab tale in which it is said that a genius imprisoned in a copper vase, promised, during the first ten centuries of his captivity, to give wealth to whoever would deliver him ; then, furious at having waited so long, he swore to kill the imprudent one who would break the cover of the vase.

Catherine had reached that point.

She had first decided to be gracious to the one who would come to meet her. She then made up her mind to vent her anger on the first one she would see.

Bussy, all plume-bedecked, appeared at the gates and looked out like a night-watchman who hears rather than sees. "Who is there ?" he cried.

Catherine expected genuflections at least. Her attendant officer looked at her to learn her wishes.

"Go to the barrier," she said. "They have asked 'Who is there ?' Reply, monsieur ; it is a formality."

The gentleman advanced to the end of the drawbridge.

"It is her Majesty the Queen-mother who comes to visit the good city of Angers," he replied.

"Very well, monsieur," replied Bussy. "Turn to the left, and about eighty feet from here, you will find the postern."

"The postern !" cried the gentleman. "A small door for her Majesty !"

Bussy was no longer there to hear. Followed by his friends, who were laughing in their sleeve, he had advanced towards the place where, in obedience to his instruction, the queen-mother was to alight.

"Has your Majesty heard ?" asked the gentleman. "The postern."

"Ah, yes, monsieur, I heard. Let us enter there since that is necessary."

The flash from her eyes terrified the blunderer who had emphasized her humiliation. The *cortége* turned to the left, and the postern was opened.

Bussy dismounted, and with drawn sword, advanced through the little door. He bowed to Catherine with great respect, while around him the hat-plumes swept the ground.

"Your Majesty is welcome in Angers," he said.

Beside him were drums that did not beat, and soldiers who did not present arms. The queen descended from her litter, and leaning on the arm of one of her gentlemen, advanced towards the door after having spoken these words,—

"Thank you, M. de Bussy."

This was the result of all the meditations she had had time to make. She advanced with her head erect, but Bussy stopped her, and even caught her arm.

"Take care, madame, the door is low and your Majesty might hurt herself."

"I must then stoop; but how? It is the first time I have entered a city thus." These words, uttered with perfect calmness, had for clever courtiers a depth of meaning which gave food for thought to more than one spectator of this scene, and Bussy himself pulled his moustache as he looked away.

"You went too far," whispered Livarot, in his ear.

"Pshaw!" said Bussy, "she will have to go through a great many more."

Her Majesty's litter was hoisted over the wall so that he could resume her place in it to go to the palace. Bussy and his friends mounted their horses and rode on either side of the litter.

"My son!" suddenly exclaimed Catherine. "I do not see my son D'Anjou."

She would have liked to keep back these words, which were forced from her by an irresistible anger. François' absence at such a moment was the height of insult.

"Monseigneur is ill in bed, madame, otherwise your

Majesty does not doubt that his Highness would have hastened to do the honors of his good city of Angers."

Here Catherine was sublimely hypocritical.

" Ill,—my poor child is ill ? " she cried. " Ah, gentlemen, let us hasten ! He is well cared for, I hope ? "

" We are doing our best," said Bussy, looking at her with surprise, to ascertain if this woman were really a mother.

" Does he know that I am here ? " resumed Catherine, after a pause which she employed in examining all the gentlemen.

" Yes, madame, certainly."

Catherine pressed her lips together.

" He must be suffering greatly," she said in a tone of compassion.

" Horribly," said Bussy. " His Highness is subject to these sudden spells."

" Is it a sudden illness, M. de Bussy ? "

" *Mon Dieu !* yes, madame."

They reached the palace. A great crowd lined the street on either side. Bussy hurried in and reached the duke's room out of breath.

" Here she is," he said ; " take care ! "

" Is she furious ? "

" Exasperated."

" Does she complain ? "

" No, she smiles, which is much worse."

" What do the people say ? "

" They have not moved. They look upon this woman with mute terror ; if they do not know her, they have an instinctive fear."

" And she ? "

" She sends kisses, and bites her fingers."

" The devil ! "

" That is what I thought, monseigneur. Now play close game."

" We insist on war."

" *Pardieu !* ask a hundred to get ten, and with her you will only get five."

"Pshaw!" said the duke, "you must think me very weak. Are you all there? Why did not Monsoreau return?"

"I believe he is at Méridor. Oh, we can do without him."

"Her Majesty the queen-mother!" cried the usher, from the threshold of the room.

Catherine immediately appeared, pale, and dressed in black according to her wont. The Duc d'Anjou made a motion to rise, but Catherine, with an agility which no one would have suspected in this body enfeebled by age, threw herself in the arms of her son and covered him with kisses.

"She will smother him," thought Bussy; "these are real kisses, *mordieu!*"

She did more, she wept.

"Let us beware," said Antraguet to Ribeirac; "every tear will cost us a pint of blood."

Catherine, having finished her embraces, seated herself at the duke's bedside; Bussy made a sign, and the assistants withdrew. He, doing as he would in his own house, leaned against the bedpost and waited.

"Will you not see to the comforts of my poor followers, dear M. de Bussy," suddenly said Catherine. "After my son, you are our dearest friend and the master of the house, are you not? I ask this favor of you."

There could be no hesitation.

"I am caught," thought Bussy. "Madame," he said, "I am only too happy to be agreeable to your Majesty, and I hasten to obey. Wait," he murmured to himself, "you do not know the doors here as you do at the Louvre; I shall return." And he went out without even being able to make a sign to the duke; Catherine suspected him, and did not lose sight of him for a moment.

She then tried to find out whether her son were really ill or only pretending. That was to be the base of all her diplomatic operations. But François, who was the worthy son of such a mother, played his part to perfection.

She had wept; he had fever. Catherine was deceived,

and believed him ill ; she hoped to have more influence on a mind weakened by suffering. She overwhelmed the duke with tenderness, embraced him again, and wept to such an extent that the duke inquired the reason of these tears.

" You have run so great a danger, my child," she replied.

" In escaping from the Louvre, mother ? "

" No, after having escaped."

" How so ? "

" Those who aided you in this escape—"

" Well ? "

" They were your worst enemies."

" She knows nothing," he thought, " but she would like to know."

" The King of Navarre," she said brusquely, " the eternal scourge of our race,—I know him well."

" Ah, ah," he said to himself, " she knows all ! "

" Would you believe that he boasts of it ? " she asked.

" He thinks he has gained everything."

" It is impossible," he replied ; " you have been deceived."

" Why so ? "

" Because he had nothing to do with my escape, and even if he did, I am safe, as you see. I have not seen the King of Navarre for two years."

" I am not speaking of that danger only," said Catherine, seeing that the blow had been parried.

" What next, mother ? " he asked, looking at the tapestry of his alcove, which moved behind the queen.

Catherine approached François, and in a voice which she made as solemn as possible, " The king's anger," she said,—" that furious anger which threatens you."

" This danger is like the other, madame ; I believe the king, my brother, to be furiously angry, but I am safe."

" You think so," she said, in a tone which could strike terror to the boldest heart.

The tapestry moved.

" I am sure of it," replied the duke, " and this is so true

that you have come in person to tell me so, my good mother."

" How ? " said Catherine, uneasy at this calmness.

" Because," he said, after another glance at the partition, " if you had been charged only with threats, you would not have come ; the king would have hesitated to furnish me with a hostage like your Majesty."

Catherine was frightened, and raised her head.

" I, a hostage ! " she said.

" The holiest and most venerable of all," he replied with a smile ; and as he kissed Catherine's hand, he glanced triumphantly at the woodworks.

Catherine dropped her arms, crushed ; she could not guess that Bussy was watching his master through a secret door, holding him beneath his glance, and sending him courage and boldness at every hesitation.

" My son," she said, " you are perfectly right ; I bring you words of peace."

" I am listening, mother, and you know my respect," said François. " I think we are beginning to understand each other."

CHAPTER LXVIII.

LITTLE CAUSES AND GREAT EFFECTS.

DURING this first part of the conversation, Catherine had been under a visible disadvantage.

This species of failure was not foreseen, and was so unusual that she was beginning to ask herself if her son would be as firm in his refusal as he seemed, when a very small event suddenly changed the face of things.

We have seen battles nearly lost, and then won by a change of wind, and *vice versa* ; Marengo and Waterloo are a double example. A grain of sand impedes the action of the most powerful machines.

Bussy, in a secret corridor which opened into M. le Duc d'Anjou's alcove, was placed so as to be seen by the duke alone ; from his hiding-place, he put his head through

the tapestry whenever he thought his cause was endangered.

His cause, we can understand, was war at any price ; he had to remain in Anjou as long as M. de Monsoreau would be there, to watch the husband and visit the wife. This policy, though very simple, greatly complicated that of France : great effects have little causes. For this reason, Bussy, with many furious grimaces, violent gestures, and a frightful play of the eyebrows, urged his master to obstinacy.

The duke, who was afraid of Bussy, suffered himself to be urged, and was, as we have seen, extremely ferocious.

Catherine was therefore defeated on all sides, and already thinking of making an honorable retreat, when a little event, almost as unexpected as M. le Duc d'Anjou's strength of will, came to her rescue.

While the conversation between the mother and son was most lively, and the duke's resistance most energetic, Bussy suddenly felt his cloak pulled. Anxious to lose nothing of the conversation, he put his hand to the place and felt a wrist ; going along the wrist, he felt an arm, then a shoulder, then a man. This was of sufficient importance to make him turn around, and he did so. The man was Rémy.

Bussy wished to speak, but Rémy placed his finger on his lips, and gently drew his master into the neighboring room.

" What is the matter, Rémy ? " asked the count, very impatiently, " and why do you disturb me at such a moment ? "

" A letter ? " whispered Rémy.

" The devil take you ! for a letter you disturb me from a most important interview with the Duc d'Anjou."

Rémy seemed in no way disturbed by this greeting.

" There are letters and letters, " he said.

" No doubt, " said Bussy. " Where is this one from ? "

" From Méridor."

" Oh, " said Bussy, " from Méridor ! Thank you, my good Rémy, thank you."

" So I did not do wrong ? "

" Can you do wrong ? Where is that letter ? "

" Ah, this made me think it was most important ; the messenger will deliver it only into your own hands."

" He is right. Is he here ? "

" Yes."

" Bring him."

Rémy opened a door, and made a sign to a sort of groom.

" Here is M. de Bussy," he said, pointing to the count.

" Give it to me ; I am the one whom you seek," said Bussy, and he slipped a half-crown into his hand.

" Oh, I know you well," said the groom, as he handed the letter.

" Did she send it ? "

" No, not she,—he."

" Who ? " quickly asked Bussy, as he glanced at the writing.

" M. de Saint-Luc."

" Ah, ah ! "

Bussy had grown slightly pale, because he imagined that the word *he* referred to the husband, and M. de Monsoreau enjoyed the privilege of making Bussy turn pale every time Bussy thought of him.

The count therefore turned aside to read, and, while reading, conceal that emotion which every one must fear to exhibit on receipt of an important letter, when one is neither Cæsar Borgia, Catherine de Medicis, Machiavelli, nor the devil.

Poor Bussy was right to turn away, because scarcely had he read the letter we already know than the blood rushed to his brain like an angry sea ; from pale he became crimson, and felt so dizzy that his strength gave way, and he dropped on a chair near the window.

" Go," said Rémy to the groom, who was amazed at the effect produced by the letter he had brought, and he pushed the man by the shoulders. The groom fled swiftly ; he feared the news was bad and he might be

forced to give up his half-crown. Rémy returned to the count.

“ *Mordieu !* ” he said, “ answer me at once, or by the holy Æsculapius, I will bleed you.”

Bussy rose ; he was no longer pale, he was no longer dizzy ; he was gloomy.

“ See what Saint-Luc has done for me,” he said, and he handed the letter to Rémy, who read it eagerly.

“ Well,” he said, “ all this seems very fine, and M. de Saint-Luc is a gallant friend. Trust a man of sense for sending a soul to purgatory ; he goes at it the right way.”

“ This is incredible,” murmured Bussy.

“ Of course, it is incredible, but never mind. Here is your position. Within a year, I shall have a Comtesse de Bussy for my patient, and *mordieu !* you can trust me as you would Ambroise Paré.”

“ Yes,” said Bussy, “ she will be my wife.”

“ It seems to me,” replied Rémy, “ that you will not have much to do to bring that about, as she is already more your wife than she was the wife of her husband.”

“ Monsoreau dead ! ”

“ Dead,” repeated Le Haudoin ; “ it is written.”

“ Oh, it seems like a dream, Rémy. What ! I shall no longer see that kind of spectre always ready to rise between me and my happiness ? Rémy, we are mistaken.”

“ We are not in the least mistaken. Read it over, *mordieu !* —fallen on the poppies, and so heavily that he is dead ! I had already observed that it is very dangerous to fall on poppies ; but I thought this danger existed only for women.”

“ But then,” said Bussy, following his own train of thought, and not listening to his friend’s witticisms, “ Diane cannot remain at Méridor. I do not wish it. She must go where she can forget.”

“ I think Paris would do very well for that,” said Le Haudoin ; “ one forgets very well in Paris.”

“ You are right. She will return to her little house of the Rue des Tournelles, and we shall pass the ten months

of her widowhood in obscurity, if happiness can be obscure, and marriage will be for us only a continuation of bliss."

" True," said Rémy, " but to go to Paris—"

" Well ?"

" We must have something."

" What ?"

" Peace in Anjou!"

" Ah, yes," said Bussy. " *Mon Dieu !* how much time has been uselessly wasted."

" That means that you will mount your horse and rush to Méridor."

" Not I, but you ; I am kept here, and besides, at such a moment, my presence would be almost indecent."

" How shall I see her ? Shall I present myself at the castle ? "

" No ; go first to the old copse. She may be walking there, expecting me ; then if you do not see her, go to the castle."

" What shall I tell her ? "

" That I am nearly mad," and pressing the hand of the young man on whom experience had taught him that he could depend as on his second self, he hastened to resume his place behind the tapestry in the alcove. During Bussy's absence, Catherine was trying to regain the advantage which his presence had made her lose.

" My son," she said, " it seemed to me that a mother and child could never fail to understand each other."

" Yet you see that it sometimes happens, mother," replied the Duc d'Anjou.

" Never, when she wishes it."

" Madame, you mean when they wish it," replied the duke, delighted with himself and seeking Bussy's glance of approbation for this bold speech.

" But I wish it ! " cried Catherine. " Do you hear, François ? I wish it." The tone of her voice contrasted with the words, for they were imperative while the voice was almost supplicating.

" You see ! " said the Duc d'Anjou, smiling.

" Yes, " said Catherine, " I wish it, and every sacrifice to attain that end will be made."

" Ah, ah, " said François, " the devil ! "

" Yes, dear child ; tell me, what do you require ? What do you wish ? Speak, command ! "

" Oh, mother ! " said François almost embarrassed at this easy victory which did not give him the opportunity to show himself exacting.

" Listen, my son, " said Catherine, in her most caressing voice. " You do not wish to drown the kingdom in blood ; that is impossible. You are neither a bad Frenchman nor a bad brother."

" My brother has insulted me, madame, and I owe him nothing more,—nothing as a brother and nothing as a king."

" But I, François ? You have no cause to complain of me."

" Yes, madame, for you abandoned me ! " replied the duke, thinking that Bussy was still there to hear him.

" Ah, you wish to kill me ! " said Catherine, in a gloomy voice. " Well I shall die as a woman should, when she sees her sons thirsting for each other's blood." Needless to say that Catherine had not the slightest desire to die.

" Oh, do not say that, madame ; you break my heart ! " cried François, who was not moved in the least.

Catherine burst into tears. The duke took her hands and tried to pacify her, while he cast uneasy glances towards the alcove.

" But what do you wish ? " she asked. " Express your demands, that we may at least know how we stand."

" What do you wish, mother ? " replied François. " Speak. I am listening."

" I desire that you should return to Paris, dear child ; that you should return to the court of the king, your brother, who will receive you with open arms."

" Eh, *mordieu* ! Madame, I see it but too well. He will not receive me in his arms but in the Bastille."

"No; return, and on my honor, on my love as a mother, on the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ," here Catherine made the sign of the cross, "you will be received by the king as though you were the king and he the Duc d'Anjou."

The duke's gaze was obstinately directed towards the alcove.

"Accept," continued Catherine,—"accept, my son. Do you desire other provinces; do you wish guards?"

"Eh, madame, your son gave me some, and even a guard of honor, since he chose his four favorites."

"Come, do not reply in this manner. You will choose the guards yourself; you will have a captain, and if you wish, this captain will be M. de Bussy."

The duke, shaken in his resolution by this offer, which he thought would please Bussy, threw another glance towards the alcove, half fearful of finding flashing eyes and white teeth glittering in the darkness. But oh, surprise! he beheld Bussy laughing, joyous, and nodding in approbation.

"What can this mean?" he asked himself. "Was Bussy anxious for war only to become captain of my guards?"

"Then I must accept?" he said aloud, as though talking to himself.

"Yes, yes!" said Bussy, with his hands, his shoulders, and his head.

"Leave Anjou, and return to Paris?" continued the duke.

"Yes, yes!" motioned Bussy, with increased energy.

"No doubt, my child," said Catherine; "but is it, then, so difficult to return to Paris?"

"Faith," said the duke to himself, "I am all at sea! It was agreed that I should refuse everything, and now he urges me to friendship and peace."

"Well," said Catherine, anxiously, "what is your answer?"

"I shall reflect," said the duke, who wished to consult Bussy about this sudden change; "and to-morrow—"

"He is yielding," thought Catherine. "Well, I have won the battle."

"Bussy may be right, after all," said the duke, who parted with his mother after an affectionate embrace.

CHAPTER LXIX.

HOW M. DE MONSOREAU OPENED AND SHUT HIS EYES, WHICH PROVES THAT HE WAS NOT QUITE DEAD.

A GOOD friend is a comfort, all the greater because very rare. Rémy was saying this to himself as he galloped across the fields mounted on one of the prince's best horses. He would have taken Roland; but as M. de Monsoreau had had that same idea earlier in the day, he was forced to be satisfied with another.

"I love M. de Bussy," said Le Haudoin to himself, "and I also think that he loves me. I am so joyful to-day because I feel happy for two." Then he added, as he drew a deep breath, "Really, I do not find my heart wide enough. What shall I say to Madame Diane? If she is stiff, ceremonious, and funereal, silent salutations with my hand on my heart; if she smiles, a *pirouette* and a *polonaise*, which I shall dance all alone. As for M. de Saint-Luc, if he be still at the castle, which I doubt, I shall compliment him in Latin. He will not be funereal. Ah, I approach."

The horse, after having turned to the left, then to the right, trotted down the path through the forest, and now entered the copse which led to the wall.

"Oh, the beautiful poppies!" said Rémy; "they remind me of our master of the hounds; those upon which he fell could not be more beautiful than these, poor dear man!"

Rémy was nearing the wall. All at once the horse stopped, with open nostrils and staring eyes. Rémy, who had been galloping, nearly went over the head of Mithri-

dates. (That was the name of the horse he had taken instead of Roland.) Rémy, who had become a fearless rider, put spurs into his horse's sides, but Mithridates did not move. He had no doubt received this name for his obstinate character, which resembled that of the King of Pontus.

Rémy, greatly surprised, looked down to see what obstacle lay in the way ; but he only saw a large pool of blood gradually being absorbed by the earth and the flowers.

" Well," he cried, " this must be the spot where M. de Saint-Luc ran M. de Monsoreau through with his sword." He looked down, then all around. Ten paces before him he perceived two stiff legs and a body even stiffer. The legs were stretched out, and the body leaned against a wall.

" It is Monsoreau !" exclaimed Rémy. " *Hic obiit Nimrod !* Come, come, if the widow leaves him thus exposed to the crows and vultures, this is a good sign for us, and the funeral oration will take the form of *pirouettes* and the *polonaise*." And Rémy, having dismounted, took a few steps in the direction of the body.

" This is queer," he said ; " here he is, dead,—perfectly dead. Yet the blood is over there. Ah, here is the track ! He must have come here ; or rather, that good M. de Saint-Luc, who is charity personified, placed him near this wall that the blood might not rush to his head. Yes, that is it. He is dead, with his eyes wide open,—stark dead ! "

All at once he stepped back in horror. The two eyes that he had seen wide open had closed again, and a pallor even more livid than the first had spread over the dead man's face. Rémy became almost as pale as M. de Monsoreau ; but as he was a physician, and something of a materialist, he muttered as he scratched his nose,—

" *Credere portentis mediocre.* If he has shut his eyes, he is not dead ; " and as, in spite of his materialism, the position was a most unpleasant one, and the points of his knees bent more than was comfortable, he sat, or rather

dropped, at the foot of a tree, and found himself face to face with the corpse.

“ I do not know where I read that after death certain phenomena take place which signify only a giving way of the matter,—that is, a beginning of decomposition. Devil of a man, who must worry us even after death ! His eyes not only closed, but the pallor increased,—*chroma chlôron*, as Galien says ; *color albus*, to quote Cicero, who was a very witty speaker. Besides, there is one way of ascertaining whether he is dead or no, and that is to bury my sword in his body ; if he does not move, he will be really dead.”

Rémy was preparing for this charitable action, and had already put his hand to his sword, when Monsoreau’s eyes opened again. This accident produced an effect contrary to the first. Rémy bounded up, and a cold perspiration gathered on his brow. This time the dead man’s eyes remained staring.

“ He is not dead ! ” murmured Rémy, “ he is not dead ! Well, here we are in a nice position ! ” A thought came most naturally to the young man’s mind : “ He is alive ; but if I kill him, he will be really dead.” And he looked at Monsoreau, who seemed to read his very soul and understand his evil intentions.

“ Fie ! ” suddenly cried Rémy ; “ what a hideous thought ! Heaven knows that if he were standing before me brandishing his sword I would kill him without compunction ; but such as he is now, without strength and three-quarters dead, it would be more than crime ; it would be infamy.”

“ Help ! ” cried Monsoreau, “ help ! I am dying.”

“ *Mordieu !* ” said Rémy, “ the position is critical. I am a physician, and it is my duty to relieve my suffering neighbor. It is true that Monsoreau is so ugly that I might almost be excused for not calling him my neighbor, but he is of the same species,—*genus homo*. Come, let me forget that my name is Rémy, that I am M. de Bussy’s friend, and let me do my duty as a physician.”

“ Help ! ” repeated the wounded man.

“ Here I am,” said Rémy.

“ Get me a priest or a physician.”

“ The physician is here, and may enable you to dispense with the priest.”

“ Rémy,” said Monsoreau, recognizing him, “ by what chance ? ” As may be seen, Monsoreau was faithful to his character. Even in his agony, he was still suspicious, and asked questions. Rémy understood the bearing of his questions. This wood was not a beaten road, and no one came there without having business. The question was therefore almost natural.

“ How did you come here ? ” asked Monsoreau, whose suspicions gave him strength.

“ *Pardieu !* ” replied Rémy. “ I met M. de Saint-Luc about a league from here.”

“ Ah, my murderer ! ” murmured Monsoreau, turning pale with anger and suffering.

“ He said to me, ‘ Rémy, go to the wood, and in the copse you will find a dead man.’ ”

“ Dead ! ” repeated Monsoreau.

“ Well, he thought so,” said Rémy ; “ so I came, I saw, and you are conquered.”

“ Now, you are speaking to a man ; fear nothing, and tell me if I am mortally wounded.”

“ The devil ! ” said Rémy, “ you are asking a great deal, but I shall try ; let me see.”

We have said that the physician’s conscience had vanquished his friendship. He therefore approached Monsoreau, and with the greatest precautions removed his cloak, his doublet, and his shirt. The sword had penetrated between the sixth and seventh ribs.

“ Humph ! ” said Rémy, “ are you suffering much ? ”

“ Not in my chest, but in my back.”

“ Which portion of your back ? ”

“ Beneath the shoulder-blade.”

“ The sword must have struck against a bone,” said Rémy, “ thence the suffering.” And he examined the spot indicated by the count. “ No, no,” he said, “ I was mistaken ; the sword came against nothing at all, and

went right through you. *Peste!* what a neat thrust! There is some pleasure in attending M. de Saint-Luc's victims. You are perforated."

Monsoreau fainted, but Rémy did not trouble himself about this weakness.

"Ah, that is it; syncope and weak pulse." He felt the hands and feet; they were cold. He placed his ear on the chest; absence of noise and no hollow sound. "The devil!" he murmured, "Madame Diane's widowhood may after all be a question of time."

At this moment a reddish foam appeared on the wounded man's lips. Rémy quickly drew a lancet from his pocket, then he tore a strip from Monsoreau's shirt and compressed his arm.

"We shall see," he said; "if the blood flows, Madame Diane may not be a widow. But if it should not flow—Ah, ah, it flows! Pardon me, my dear M. de Bussy, but I am a physician first and foremost."

The blood after hesitating, spurted from the vein; the wounded man opened his eyes almost at the same moment.

"Ah," he murmured, "I thought it was all over."

"Not yet, my dear monsieur; it is even possible—"

"That I may recover?"

"*Mon Dieu!* yes; but let us first close the wound. Wait, do not move. Nature at this moment is assisting me. I put a bandage and she makes a clot of blood. I make it flow and she stops it. Ah, monsieur, Nature is a great surgeon. Now, let me wipe your lips," and Rémy passed a handkerchief over the count's mouth.

"Now see," continued Rémy, "the hemorrhage has already stopped. You are better; so much the worse."

"How! so much the worse?"

"So much the better for you, certainly; but so much the worse! I know what I am saying. My dear M. de Monsoreau, I fear I shall have the good fortune of curing you."

“ How ! you fear ? ”

“ Yes, I understand what I mean.”

“ You think I shall recover ? ”

“ Alas ! ”

“ You are a singular doctor, Monsieur Rémy.”

“ What do you care, provided I save you ? ” Now let us see.”

Rémy, having tied up the wound, rose.

“ Do you abandon me ? ” asked the count.

“ Ah, do not talk too much, my dear monsieur.—I ought rather to advise him to scream.”

“ I do not understand you.”

“ Fortunately. Now, here you are, bandaged.”

“ Well ? ”

“ Well, I am going to the castle for assistance.”

“ And what shall I do during that time ? ”

“ Remain perfectly still, do not move, breathe gently, and try not to cough and disturb that precious clot. What is the nearest house ? ”

“ The Château de Méridor.”

“ What is the road ? ” asked Rémy, affecting the most perfect ignorance.

“ Climb over the wall into the park, or follow the wall until you reach the gate.”

“ I shall not be long.”

“ Thank you, generous man.”

“ If you knew how far I carried generosity, you would thank me even more,” murmured Rémy ; and mounting his horse, he galloped in the direction indicated. At the end of five minutes, he reached the castle, all the inmates of which were searching the thickets and walks without being able to find their master’s body, because Saint-Luc, to gain time, had sent them on the wrong track.

Rémy fell in the midst of them like a meteor, and made them follow his footsteps. He showed so much eagerness that Madame de Monsoreau could not help looking at him in surprise. A secret thought came to her, and in one second tarnished the angelic purity of her soul.

"Ah, I thought him M. de Bussy's friend," she murmured as Rémy disappeared, taking with him a stretcher, lint, cool water, and all that was necessary for the dressing. Æsculapius could not have done better with the wings of his divinity.

CHAPTER LXX.

HOW M. LE DUC D'ANJOU WENT TO MÉRIDOR TO CONGRATULATE MADAME DE MONSOREAU ON THE DEATH OF HER HUSBAND, AND FOUND M. DE MONSOREAU THERE TO RECEIVE HIM.

So soon as the duke had finished his conversation with his mother, he hastened to join Bussy to inquire into the cause of this incredible change. Bussy, having returned to his apartment, was reading over for the fifth time Saint-Luc's letter, which impressed him more pleasantly each time.

On the other hand, Catherine, having retired to her rooms, was giving orders and making preparations for her departure, which could take place, she thought, within a day or two.

Bussy received the prince with a most gracious smile.

"What ! monseigneur," he said, "does your Highness deign to come and visit me ?"

"Eh, *mordieu !*" said the duke. "I come to demand an explanation!"

"From me ?"

"Yes, from you."

"I am listening."

"You tell me to steel myself against my mother's attacks and sustain the shock valiantly ; I do so, and in the hottest of the fight, when none of the blows have told on me, you come and say, 'take off your coat of mail and surrender !'"

"I made all these injunctions, monseigneur, because I was ignorant of the object of Madame Catherine's visit ;

but now that I see that she has come to promote your Highness's honor and glory—”

“ How ! ” said the duke,—“ to promote my honor and glory ? What do you mean ? ”

“ No doubt,” said Bussy. “ What does your Highness wish ? To triumph over your enemies, do you not ? I do not believe, as certain persons say, that you dream of becoming King of France.”

The duke cast a furtive glance at Bussy.

“ Some may perhaps advise you to do so, monseigneur,” said the young man, “ but believe me, those who do so are your worst enemies. If they are too tenacious, and you do not know how to get rid of them, send them to me. I shall convince them that they are on the wrong track.”

The duke made a face.

“ Besides,” continued Bussy, “ consider yourself. Have you a hundred thousand men, ten million crowns, foreign allies, and above all, do you wish to go against your lord and master ? ”

“ My lord and master did not hesitate to go against me,” said the duke.

“ Ah, if you take it on that footing, you are right. Well, declare yourself, get crowned, and take the title of King of France. I ask for nothing better than to see you succeed ; for if you rise, I shall rise with you.”

“ Who talks of being King of France ? ” angrily asked the duke. “ You are discussing a question which I have never asked any one to settle, not even myself.”

“ Then all is settled, monseigneur, and there can be no more discussion between us, since you have settled the principal point.”

“ Do we agree ? ”

“ It seems so to me. Let them give you a guard and five hundred thousand crowns. Before the peace is signed, demand a subsidy for Anjou in case of war. Once you have it, keep it. In this manner we shall have men, money, power, and we shall go—God knows where ! ”

“ But once in Paris near them, when they have me there, they will laugh at me,” said the duke.

"Come, monseigneur, you are not thinking of what you say. They laugh at us! Did you not hear what the queen-mother offered you?"

"She offered me a great deal."

"I understand; and this troubles you?"

"Yes."

"But among other things, she offered you a company of guards, even if I were to command them."

"Yes, she did."

"Well, accept. Appoint Bussy your captain, Antragues and Livarot, lieutenants, and Ribeirac, ensign. Let us get up this company as we see fit, and you will see that with this escort at your heels, no one will dare laugh at you and not salute you; not even the king."

"Faith!" said the duke, "I think you are right, Bussy, and I shall think about it."

"Think over it, monseigneur."

"Yes, but what were you reading there so attentively when I came in?"

"Ah, pardon me. I forgot. A letter."

"A letter?"

"Which must interest you even more than me. What the devil was I thinking of that I did not show it to you at once!"

"Was it a great piece of news?"

"*Mon Dieu!* yes, and rather sad news at that; M. de Monsoreau is dead."

"What?" cried the duke, with a movement of such marked surprise that Bussy, who had his eyes fixed on the prince, thought he detected signs of joy.

"Dead, monseigneur."

"M. de Monsoreau?"

"Eh, *mon Dieu!* yes; are we not all mortal?"

"Yes, but we do not die thus suddenly."

"That depends. If one is killed—"

"Was he killed?"

"It seems so."

"By whom?"

"By Saint-Luc, with whom he picked a quarrel."

" Ah, that dear Saint-Luc ! " cried the prince.

" Why, " said Bussy, " I was not aware of your friendship for that dear Saint-Luc ! "

" He is my brother's friend, " said the duke, " and since we are to be reconciled, my brother's friends are mine."

" Ah, very well, monseigneur, and I am charmed to see you in this mood."

" And you are sure ? "

" As sure as I can be. Here is a note from Saint-Luc announcing this death, and as I am as incredulous as you, I sent Rémy to ascertain the fact and present my compliments of condolence to the old baron."

" Dead, — Monsoreau dead ! " repeated the duke, " dead, by himself."

These words and the " dear Saint-Luc " betrayed his thoughts. Both were horribly plain.

" He did not die by himself, since Saint-Luc killed him, " said Bussy.

" Oh, I understand myself."

" Had Monseigneur given him to some one else to kill ? " asked Bussy.

" No ; had you ? "

" Oh, I, monseigneur,—I am not a great prince to have that work done by others, and I am obliged to do it myself."

" Ah, Monsoreau, Monsoreau ! " said the prince, with his frightful smile.

" Come, monseigneur, you seem to have had a grudge against that poor count."

" No, but you did."

" It was very simple that I should, " said Bussy, blushing in spite of himself. " Did he not subject me to a most terrible humiliation on the part of your Highness ? "

" Do you still remember that ? "

" Yes, monseigneur, as you see ; but you whose friend and tool he was—"

" Come, come, " said the prince, interrupting the conversation, which was getting embarrassing for him, " have the horses prepared, Bussy."

" Horses ? in What for ? "

" To go to Méridor and condole with Madame Diane. I planned this visit long ago, and cannot imagine why I did not pay it ; but I shall delay no longer. *Corbleu !* I know not why, but I feel most complimentary to-day."

" Faith ! " said Bussy to himself, " now that Monsoreau is dead, I have no more fear that he will sell his wife to the duke ; so I do not care if he does see her. Should he attack her, I am quite able to defend her ; and as I have this good opportunity to see her again, I shall avail myself of it."

And he went out to give orders about the horses.

A quarter of an hour later, while Catherine slept, or pretended to sleep, after the fatigue of her journey, the prince, Bussy, and ten gentlemen, mounted on fine horses, wended their way towards Méridor with that vigor and spirit which fine weather, green grass, and youth, always inspire in men and horses.

At the sight of this magnificent cavalcade, the porter of the castle came to inquire the names of the visitors.

" The Duc d'Anjou ! " cried the prince.

The porter blew his horn, and at this sound all the servants of the castle hastened to the drawbridge. They were then seen rushing through the apartments and corridors ; the turret-windows were opened ; there was a sound of clashing iron and the old baron appeared on the threshold, holding in his hand the castle keys.

" It is amazing how little Monsoreau is regretted," said the duke ; " see, Bussy, how unconcerned they all seem to be."

A woman appeared on the porch.

" Ah, here is the fair Diane," cried the duke. " Do you see her, Bussy ? "

" Certainly, monseigneur, I see her," replied the young man ; " but," he added in a low voice, " I do not see Rémy."

Diane came out of the house, but immediately behind her was a stretcher on which lay Monsoreau. His eyes were bright with fever or jealousy, and he resembled a

sultan of India on his palanquin rather than a dead man on his funeral couch.

"Oh, oh, what is this?" cried the duke to his companion, who had turned whiter than the handkerchief behind which he was trying to conceal his emotion.

"Long live Monseigneur the Duc d'Anjou!" cried Monsoreau, raising his hand in the air by a violent effort.

"Gently," said a voice behind him, "take care, or you will open the wound." It was Rémy who, faithful to his duty as a physician, watched over the wounded man. Astonishment does not last long at court,—on the face, at least; the Duc d'Anjou quickly changed amazement into a smile.

"Oh, my dear count," he cried, "what a happy surprise! Do you know we had heard that you were dead?"

"Come near, monseigneur," said the wounded man, "that I may kiss your hand. Thank God, I am not only alive, but I shall live, I hope, to serve you with more ardor and fidelity than ever."

As for Bussy, who was neither husband nor prince,—the two stations in life in which dissimulation is most necessary,—he felt a cold perspiration gather on his brow, and dared not even look at Diane. The sight of this treasure which he was losing for the second time, hurt him, when so near its possessor.

"And you, M. de Bussy," said Monsoreau, "let me thank you, for I nearly owe you my life."

"How to me?" stammered the young man, thinking that the count spoke in jest.

"Yes, indirectly it is true, but my gratitude is none the less great; here is my saviour," he added, pointing to Rémy, who raised his arms to heaven in despair and would have liked the earth to open and swallow him. "My friends owe it to him that I am still with them."

And in spite of the signs which the poor doctor was making for him to remain silent, and which he took for hygienic recommendations, he emphatically related the care, skill, and zeal which Rémy had shown him.

The duke knit his brow, and Bussy glared at Rémy with

a frightful expression. The poor fellow, hidden behind Monsoreau, replied with a gesture which said, "Alas! it is not my fault."

"I hear," continued the count, "that Rémy one day found you dying as he found me. It is a tie of friendship between us. Count on mine, M. de Bussy. When Monsoreau loves, he loves well; but when he hates, it is also with his whole heart."

Bussy thought the count's eyes flashed as he glanced at the duke, but M. d'Anjou saw nothing.

"Come," he said, dismounting and offering his hand to Diane, "deign, fair lady, to do us the honors of this house which we had expected to find in grief, but which, on the contrary, continues to be the abode of joy. As for you, Monsoreau, take the rest you need."

"Monseigneur," said the count, "it shall not be said that you came to Monsoreau's house and that while he lived he allowed any one else to do the honors of the place; my servants will carry me, and wherever you will go, I shall follow."

The duke seemed to divine Monsoreau's real thought this time, for he let go of Diane's hand. The husband breathed again.

"Go near her," whispered Rémy to Bussy.

Bussy approached Diane, and Monsoreau smiled on them; Bussy took her hand, and Monsoreau still smiled.

"This is a great change, Monsieur le Comte," said Diane, in a low voice.

"Alas!" said Bussy, "why is it not even greater?"

It is needless to say that in receiving the prince, the old baron displayed the greatest hospitality.

CHAPTER LXXI.

THE INCONVENIENCE OF WIDE LITTERS AND
NARROW DOORS.

Bussy did not leave Diane ; Monsoreau's smiles gave him a liberty of which he was only too glad to avail himself. Jealous persons have this privilege, that, after they have made a brave fight to keep their property, they are not spared when once poachers have set foot on their estates.

"Madame," said Bussy to Diane, "I am really the most unfortunate of men. At the news of his death, I advised the prince to return to Paris and make peace with his mother ; he consented, and now you remain in Anjou."

"Oh, Louis," replied the young woman, pressing Bussy's hand with the tips of her slender fingers, "how dare you say that we are miserable ? Do you forget those beautiful days, those unspeakable joys, the mere memory of which thrills my very being ? "

"I forget nothing, madame ; on the contrary, I remember only too well, and this is why I suffer at the thought of losing this happiness. Think of my torture if I must return to Paris far from you. It breaks my heart, Diane, and makes me a coward."

Diane looked at Bussy, and saw so much grief in his eyes that she lowered her head and reflected. The young man waited for a moment with a pleading glance and clasped hands.

"Well," finally said Diane, "you will go to Paris, Louis, and so shall I."

"What !" cried the young man, "you will leave M. de Monsoreau ? "

"Were I to leave him, he would not leave me," replied Diane. "No, believe me, Louis, it is best that he should come with us."

"Wounded ! ill as he is, impossible ! "

"He will come, I tell you," and leaving Bussy's arm, she approached the prince, who, in a very bad humor, was

replying to Monsoreau, while Ribeirac, Antraguet, and Livarot clustered around the litter. As Diane drew near, the count's brow cleared. But this moment of calm was not of long duration ; it vanished like a ray of sunshine between two storms. Diane went to the duke, and Monsoreau frowned.

" Monseigneur," she said, with a charming smile, " I am told that your Highness is passionately fond of flowers. Come, and I shall show you the most beautiful ones in Anjou."

François gallantly offered his hand.

" Whither are you taking Monseigneur, madame ? " asked Monsoreau, uneasily.

" Into the conservatory, monsieur."

" Ah," said Monsoreau, " very well, carry me into the conservatory."

" Faith ! " said Rémy, " I think I was quite right not to kill him, thank God ! He will kill himself now."

Diane gave Bussy a smile full of promise.

" Let M. de Monsoreau be ignorant of the fact that you are leaving Anjou," she whispered, " and I shall manage the rest."

" Very well," said Bussy, and he approached the prince, while Monsoreau's litter passed around a clump of trees.

" Monseigneur," he said, " be very guarded in what you say. Do not let Monsoreau know that you are about to make peace."

" Why so ? "

" Because he might tell Madame Catherine, to make a friend of her ; and if she knew you had made up your mind, she might be less inclined to generosity."

" You are right," said the duke. " So you distrust him ? "

" Monsoreau ? *Parbleu !*"

" Well, so do I. I believe he pretended to be dead, only to deceive us."

" No, upon my word, he really received a sword thrust, and that idiot, Rémy, who pulled him through, really

thought him dead for a moment. His soul must be riveted to his body."

They had reached the conservatory. Diane continued to smile charmingly on the prince.

The duke went in first, then Diane ; Monsoreau wished to come next, but he soon saw that his litter could not possibly pass through the door, which was high and narrow, whereas his litter was six feet wide. At the sight of this narrow door he uttered a groan.

Diane entered the conservatory without noticing her husband's desperate gestures. Bussy, for whom her smile was perfectly clear,—he could read her heart so well,—remained near Monsoreau and said to him with perfect calmness,++

" It is useless to try, Monsieur le Comte. The door is too narrow and you will never go through."

" Monseigneur, monseigneur," cried Monsoreau, " do not go into that conservatory. The air is poisonous ; some strange flowers exhale deadly perfumes, monseigneur."

But François did not listen ; he was so happy to feel Diane's hand within his own that he forgot his usual prudence, and lost himself beneath the verdant shadows. Bussy exhorted Monsoreau to bear his sufferings with patience ; but in spite of what he could say, the count, unable to endure the mental torture, fainted away.

Rémy resumed his authority as a physician, and ordered that the wounded man should be taken to his room.

" And now," he asked the young man, " what am I to do ?"

" Eh, *pardieu !*" said Bussy, " finish the work you have so well begun. Remain with him, and cure him."

Then he told Diane of the accident which had happened to her husband. Diane immediately left the duke, and went towards the castle.

" Have we succeeded ?" asked Bussy, as she passed.

" I believe so ; at all events, do not leave without having seen Gertrude."

The duke, who loved flowers only when he could visit them with Diane, now remembered the count's words, and left the conservatory. Livarot, Ribeirac, and Antraguet followed him.

In the meantime, Diane joined her husband, to whom Rémy was attending. The count soon opened his eyes. His first movement was to rise hastily, but Rémy had foreseen this first movement, and Monsoreau was tied to his mattress. He roared, but as he looked around, he saw Diane beside him.

"Ah, you are here, madame," he said. "I am very glad to see you and tell you that we start for Paris to-night."

Rémy exclaimed, but Monsoreau paid not the slightest attention to him.

"Can you think of such a thing with your wound?" asked Diane, with her usual calmness.

"Madame," said the count, "my wound does not matter in this case, and I prefer death to suffering. Even if I am to die on the way, we start to-night."

"As you please, monsieur," said Diane.

"This is my wish, and I beg you to make your preparations."

"My preparations will soon be made, monsieur; but may I inquire into the cause of this sudden resolution?"

"I shall tell it to you, madame, when you will have no more flowers to show the prince, or when the doors will be wide enough for my litter to go everywhere."

Diane bowed.

"But, madame," said Rémy.

"Monsieur le Comte wishes it," replied Diane; "my duty is to obey."

Rémy understood from a sign that he must cease his observations. He did so, but muttered to himself,—

"They will kill him, and say that my medicine was at fault."

During this time, the Duc d'Anjou was preparing to leave Méridor. He thanked the baron for his warm wel-

come, and mounted his horse. Gertrude appeared at this moment. She came to announce that her mistress, being detained near her husband, regretted she could not have the honor of bidding farewell to the prince, and whispered to Bussy that Diane was to leave that night.

They went.

The duke had an unstable will, or rather, he bent it to satisfy his whims. While Diane was cruel to him, she made his stay in Anjou seem distasteful, but her smiles made him unwilling to depart.

As he was in ignorance of the resolution taken by the master of the hounds, he meditated all the way home on the danger there might be in yielding too easily to the desires of the queen-mother. Bussy had foreseen all this, and counted on his desire to stay.

" You see, Bussy," said the duke to him, " I have reflected."

" Well, monseigneur, and what about ? " asked the young man.

" That it might not be advisable to yield at once to my mother's wishes."

" You are right. She thinks herself clever enough without that."

" Whereas you see, if we ask for one week, or rather delay one week, if we give a few fêtes to which we shall summon all the nobility of the province, we shall show our strength."

" This is well reasoned, monseigneur, yet—"

" I shall remain here one week," said the duke, " and thanks to this delay I shall draw new concessions from the queen ; you may depend upon me."

Bussy seemed buried in thought.

" Very well, monseigneur," he said ; " obtain what you can, but try not to lose instead of profiting by this delay. The king for instance—"

" What of the king ? "

" Well, if he does not know your intentions, he may be angry ; he is very irascible, as you are aware."

" You are right ; I should send him some one who will

announce my return. That will give me the eight days I need."

"Yes, but that some one runs a great risk," said Bussy.
The Duc d'Anjou smiled his evil smile.

"You mean that I might change my mind?" he asked.

"Eh, in spite of the promise to your brother, you would change your mind if you found it to your interest to do so, would you not?"

"Perhaps."

"In that case your ambassador will be sent to the Bastille."

"He will not know the contents of the letter he will carry."

"On the contrary," said Bussy, "give him no letter, and tell him."

"Then no one will undertake the task."

"Why not?"

"Do you know any one who would?"

"Yes, I know one."

"Who?"

"Myself, monseigneur."

"You?"

"Yes, I like difficult negotiations."

"Bussy, my dear Bussy," said the duke, "if you do that you can count on my everlasting gratitude."

Bussy smiled; he knew the measure of this gratitude. The duke thought he hesitated.

"I shall give you ten thousand crowns for your journey," he added.

"Come, monseigneur," said Bussy, "such things cannot be paid."

"So you will go?"

"Yes."

"To Paris?"

"To Paris."

"When?"

"Why, when you wish."

"The sooner the better."

"Well, to-night if you say so."

"Good Bussy, dear Bussy, so you really consent?"

"Do I consent? Why, your Highness is well aware that I would go through fire to serve you. It is, then, agreed; I set out to-night, lead a joyous life, and get some fat abbey for me from the queen-mother."

"I had already thought of it, my friend."

"Then good-by, monseigneur."

"Good-by, Bussy, and do not forget one thing."

"What is that?"

"Take leave of my mother."

"I shall have that honor."

And Bussy, more light-hearted and joyous than the schoolboy at the sound of the recreation bell, paid his visit to Catherine, and stood in readiness to leave so soon as the signal would come from Méridor.

The signal did not come until the next morning. Monsoreau had felt so weak after the emotions of the afternoon that he deemed a night's rest necessary to his health. But towards ten o'clock the same groom who had brought Saint-Luc's letter came to announce to Bussy that in spite of the old baron's tears, and Rémy's opposition, the count had just set out for Paris in a litter which Diane, Rémy, and Gertrude would accompany on horseback.

This litter was carried by eight men, who were to be relayed every five leagues. Bussy was waiting for this announcement, so he jumped at once on a horse which had been waiting ready saddled since the night before, and took the same road.

CHAPTER LXXII.

WHAT MOOD KING HENRI III. WAS IN WHEN M. DE SAINT-LUC REAPPEARED AT COURT.

AFTER Catherine's departure, the king, though relying on the ambassador he had sent to Anjou, thought only of arming himself against the attacks of his enemies. He knew from experience the genius of his family, and all the

possibilities that lay in the way of a pretender to the crown,—that is to say, of the new man against the lawful possessor.

He amused himself like Tiberius in drawing up long lists of proscriptions with the assistance of Chicot, on which were written down, in alphabetical order, all those who did not show themselves zealous for the defence of the king.

These lists were becoming longer every day, and under *S* and *L*,—that is to say, twice over,—he inscribed the name of Saint-Luc. The king's anger against his former favorite was, moreover, stimulated by the court commentaries, the perfidious insinuations of the courtiers, and bitter recriminations based on Saint-Luc's flight to Anjou,—a flight which became treason on the day when the duke himself had fled to that province.

In fact, Saint-Luc's escaping to Méridor could be considered M. d'Anjou's quarter-master going to prepare lodgings in Angers.

In the midst of all this agitation and movement, Chicot, encouraging the favorites to sharpen their daggers and swords to cut and slash at his Most Christian Majesty's enemies, was magnificent to behold ; all the more so because though he seemed to play a very useless part, he really had a very important one. Little by little, man by man, so to speak, Chicot was assembling an army for his master's service.

One afternoon, while the king was supping with the queen, whose society he always cultivated in all political disturbances, Chicot entered suddenly with legs and arms extended like those of a jumping-jack.

“ Ouf ! ” he said.

“ What ? ” asked the king.

“ M. de Saint-Luc,” said Chicot.

“ M. de Saint-Luc ? ” exclaimed his Majesty.

“ Yes.”

“ In Paris ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ In the Louvre ? ”

"Yes."

After that triple affirmation, the king rose from the table, pale and trembling. It was difficult to say what sentiments agitated him.

"Pardon me," he said to the queen, after wiping his moustache and throwing his napkin on his chair, "but these are affairs of state which do not concern women."

"Yes," said Chicot, raising his voice, "these are affairs of state."

The queen wished to retire but Henri said to her,—

"I beg you to remain, madame, and I shall go into my room."

"Oh, sire," said the queen, with that tender interest she always showed in her ungrateful husband, "I entreat you not to get angry."

"May God spare me!" said Henri, without observing the quizzical way in which Chicot twirled his moustache. Henri rushed out of the room ; Chicot followed him.

"Why has the traitor come?" asked the king, in an agitated voice.

"Who knows?" replied Chicot.

"I am sure he comes as deputy from the assembly of Anjou as envoy from my brother ; for this is the course of rebellions. The rebels fish, in muddy waters, all sort of advantages which, though sordid and precarious, gradually become fixed and permanent. This one has scented the rebellion, and taken the opportunity to come here and insult me."

"Who knows?" said Chicot.

The king looked at this laconic individual.

"It may be," said Henri, walking down the gallery at a pace that betrayed his agitation, "that he has come to ask for his estates, the revenues of which I withhold from him ; this may be rather excessive abuse as, after all, he has not committed any real crime."

"Who knows?" continued Chicot.

"Ah," said Henri, "you are always repeating the same thing, like a parrot. *Mort de ma vie!* you irritate me with your eternal 'who knows?'"

"Eh, *mordieu*! do you think yourself amusing with your eternal questions?"

"You might at least answer something."

"What can I answer? Do you take me for an oracle? For Jupiter, Apollo, or Manto? You irritate me with your foolish suppositions."

"Monsieur Chicot—"

"Well, Monsieur Henri."

"Chicot, my friend, you see my sorrow, and you laugh at me."

"Have no sorrow, *mordieu*!"

"But every one betrays me."

"Who knows? *Ventre de biche!* who knows?"

Henri, losing himself in conjectures, descended to his room, where the news of Saint-Luc's return had caused all the courtiers to assemble. Among them was Crillon, who, with flaming eyes, a red nose, and bristling moustache, looked like a dog ready to fight.

Saint-Luc was standing there surrounded by all these threatening faces, feeling the anger seething around him and yet not in the least concerned. He had brought his wife and seated her on a stool near the balustrade of the bed. He was walking about and returning the glances that were levelled at him.

Out of consideration for the lady, some of the nobles had moved aside, in spite of their desire to insult Saint-Luc and to speak disagreeable words to him. The ex-favorite was moving about amid this silence.

Jeanne, modestly wrapped in her travelling-cloak, was waiting with downcast eyes. Saint-Luc, proudly wrapped in his cloak, was also waiting. Finally, the whole assembly was waiting to know the reason of Saint-Luc's reappearance at court where all were trying to divide among themselves some portion of his past favor and where his presence was considered most useless.

Expectation had reached its height when the king appeared.

Henri entered, very agitated, and busy working himself up; it is this very breathlessness which often con-

stitutes what is known as the dignity of princes. He entered, followed by Chicot, who had the calm dignity which the King of France should have shown ; he at once observed Saint-Luc's attitude, a thing which Henri III. should have done.

" You here, monsieur ? " cried the king, without heed-
ing those around him, like the Spanish bull who rushes
into the arena and sees only the red rag.

" Yes, sire," simply and modestly replied Saint-Luc as
he bowed with respect.

This answer made so little impression on the king, so
little did this dignified attitude convey to his mind a corre-
sponding sense of dignity, that he continued at once,—

" Really, your presence at the Louvre surprises me."

At this brutal aggression, a death-like silence reigned
around the king and his favorite. It was the silence
which reigns around the lists when two adversaries are
about to settle a supreme question. Saint-Luc was the
first to break it.

" Sire," he said, with his habitual elegance and without
being moved in the least by the royal anger, " I am
surprised that under the existing circumstances your
Majesty did not expect me."

" What do you mean, monsieur ? " replied Henri, with
royal pride and raising his head with an expression of
great dignity.

" Sire," replied Saint-Luc, " your Majesty is in danger."

" In danger ? " cried the courtiers.

" Yes, gentlemen, a serious, great, and real danger,—a
danger in which the king will have need of all those who
are devoted to him ; and being convinced that in a dan-
ger like this one, there is no small assistance, I come to lay
at his feet my humble services."

" Ah, ah, my son," said Chicot, " you see I was right to
say, ' Who knows ? ' "

Henri III. did not reply at first. He looked around, and
all those present seemed agitated and offended ; but
Henri soon discovered the jealousy which agitated all the
hearts. He concluded that Saint-Luc had done some-

thing of which the majority would have been incapable,—that is, something noble ; yet he would not yield at once.

“ Monsieur,” he said, “ you have only done your duty ; you owe us your services.”

“ All the subjects owe their services to the king,—I know it, sire,” replied Saint-Luc ; “ but in these times many people forget to pay their debts. I have come, sire, to pay mine, only too happy if your Majesty will deign to number me among your creditors.”

Henri, disarmed by this continuous gentleness and humility, took a step towards Saint-Luc.

“ Then,” he said, “ you return without any other motive save the one you mentioned,—without any mission or safe-conduct ?”

“ Sire,” quickly said Saint-Luc, who saw there was neither anger nor reproach in his master’s tone, “ I have returned simply and purely for the reason I gave. Now your Majesty can throw me into the Bastille or have me shot, but I shall have done my duty. Sire, Anjou is on fire ; Touraine is about to revolt ; Guyenne is rising beside them ; M. le Duc d’Anjou is working the west and south of France.”

“ And he is well seconded, is he not ? ” cried the king.

“ Sire,” said Saint-Luc, who understood the meaning of the royal words, “ neither counsel nor argument can stay the duke ; and M. de Bussy, firm as he is, cannot reassure your brother under the terror with which your Majesty inspires him.”

“ Ah, ah,” said Henri, “ he is trembling, the rebel ! ”

And he smiled under his moustache.

“ *Tudieu !* ” said Chicot, as he stroked his chin, “ here is a clever man,” and pushing the king with his elbow,—

“ Make way, Henri,” he said, “ and let me shake M. de Saint-Luc’s hand.”

This movement was followed by the king. He let Chicot pay his compliment to the new-comer, then going slowly to his old friend, he placed his hand on his shoulder and said,—

“ You are welcome, Saint-Luc.”

"Ah, sire," cried Saint-Luc, kissing the king's hand, "I find again my beloved master."

"Yes, but you are no longer the same," said the king, "or rather, you have grown so thin, my poor Saint-Luc, that I would not have recognized you."

At this moment a feminine voice was heard.

"Sire," said this voice, "it is from grief at having incurred your Majesty's displeasure."

Though this voice was gentle and respectful, Henri started, for its sound was almost as disagreeable to him as thunder was to Augustus.

"Madame de Saint-Luc!" he murmured. "Ah, true; I had forgotten—"

Jeanne fell on her knees.

"Rise, madame," said the king. "I love all those who bear the name of Saint-Luc."

Jeanne quickly seized the king's hand and carried it to her lips, but Henri as quickly drew it away.

"Go and convert the king," said Chicot to the young woman, "*ventre de biche!* you are pretty enough for that."

But Henri turned his back on Jeanne, and throwing his arm around Saint-Luc's neck, led him into the next room.

"Then we have made peace," he said.

"Say rather, that the pardon is granted, sire," replied the courtier.

"Madame," said Chicot to Jeanne, who hesitated, "a good wife must not leave her husband,—particularly, when her husband is in danger," and he pushed her after the king and Saint-Luc.

CHAPTER LXXIII.

IN WHICH WE MEET TWO IMPORTANT CHARACTERS IN THE STORY, WHO HAVE NOT BEEN SEEN FOR SOME TIME.

THERE is one character in this story,—there are even two,—about whose fate the reader has a right to inquire.

With the humility of the author of an ancient preface, we hasten to reply to these questions, all the importance of which we understand.

We mean first an enormous monk, with heavy brows, thick red lips, large hands, broad shoulders, and the length of whose neck daily decreases in inverse proportion to the development of his chest and cheeks. We next have a large donkey, whose sides are gradually swelling out like a balloon. The monk is fast getting like a hogshead ; the ass resembles a child's crib supported on four posts.

The one inhabits a cell in the convent of Sainte-Genevieve, where all the blessings of the Lord come and visit him ; the other, the stable of the same convent. The one answers to the name of Gorenflot, the second to the name of Panurge.

For the moment, both were enjoying themselves beyond their wildest dreams. The monks of Sainte-Genevieve took all possible care of their illustrious companions ; and like the divinities of the third rank, who attended Jupiter's eagle, Juno's peacock, and Venus' doves, the lay brothers devoted their energies to fattening Panurge for his master's sake. Savory odors came from the kitchen, while the choicest Burgundy wines filled the largest glasses.

If there came a missionary who had travelled in distant lands for the propagation of the faith, or a legate bearing indulgences from the Pope, they showed him Brother Gorenflot, that model churchman who preaches like Saint Luke, and uses his sword like Saint Paul. They showed him Gorenflot in all his glory,—that is to say, seated at a table in which a hollow had been cut out for his sacred stomach ; and they took great pride in saying that he could consume the rations of eight ordinary persons. And when the new-comer had piously contemplated that marvel, the prior would clasp his hands and say to him, " What an admirable nature ; Brother Gorenflot loves the pleasures of the table and cultivates the arts. You see how he eats ! Ah, if you had heard the sermon he preached one famous night, when he offered to devote

himself for the triumph of the faith ! His is a mouth which speaks like Saint John Chrysostom's, and swallows like that of Gargantua."

Sometimes, however, in the midst of all these splendors, a cloud passes over Gorenfot's brow. The capons smoke uselessly before his wide nostrils, the little Flemish oysters yawn in vain in their pearly shells. The bottles stand before him untouched. Gorenfot is gloomy ; he is no longer hungry ; he dreams.

The report spreads at once that the worthy monk is in an ecstasy like Saint Francis, or in a swoon like Saint Theresa, and the admiration increases. He is no longer a monk ; he is a saint, a demi-god, and others even go so far as to liken him to a God.

" Hush ! " they murmur, " let us not disturb Brother Gorenfot's meditation."

And all move aside. The prior then awaits the moment when Brother Gorenfot will make some sign. He approaches the monk, takes his hands, and questions him. Gorenfot raises his head, and looks vacantly at the prior, and seems to come from another world.

" What were you doing, worthy brother ? " asked the prior.

" I ? " said Gorenfot.

" Yes, you ; you were doing something."

" Yes, Father, I was composing a sermon."

" In the style of the one you gave us on the night of the League ? "

Every time that this sermon is mentioned, Gorenfot bewails his infirmity.

" Yes," he says with a sigh, " in the same style. Ah, what a pity I did not write that one ! "

" Does a man like you need to write, my dear brother ? No, you are inspired ; you open your mouth, and as the word of God is within you, it flows from your lips."

" You think so ? " said Gorenfot.

" Happy is the man who doubts," replied the prior.

From time to time, Gorenfot, who understands the necessities of his position, meditates a sermon.

Away with Marcus Tullius, Cæsar, Saint Gregory, Saint Augustine, Saint Jerome, and Tertullian ; the revival of sacred eloquence will begin with Gorenflot !

From time to time, when he has finished a meal, Gorenflot rises, and drawn by an invincible force, wends his way to the stables ; there he looks lovingly at Panurge, who brays with pleasure ; then he passes his fat hand over the thick hair, in which it almost disappears. This is no longer pleasure, it is happiness ; and Panurge not only brays, but rolls himself.

The prior and three or four dignitaries usually accompany him in these excursions, and pet Panurge ; they give him cakes, biscuits, macaroons, like those who gave honey-cakes to Cerberus in order to win Pluto's favor.

Panurge, having a most amiable disposition, suffers these attentions ; besides, as he has neither ecstasies nor sermons to meditate, and no reputation to sustain save that of obstinacy and laziness, he finds nothing more to desire, and is the happiest of donkeys.

The prior looks tenderly at him.

“ Simple and gentle,” he said ; “ those are the attributes of strength.”

Gorenflot had learned that *ita* is the Latin for “ yes.” He made marvellous use of this word, replying *ita* to all that was said to him, and always producing a fine effect. Encouraged by this perpetual agreement with all he said, the abbot would sometimes say to him,—

“ You work too much, my dear brother, and your heart grows sad.”

And Gorenflot replied to Joseph Foulon as Chicot sometimes replied to his Majesty King Henri III.,—

“ Who knows ? ”

“ Our meals are perhaps a little coarse,” added the prior ; “ you might like the cook changed. You know, my dear brother, *Quædam saturationes minus succedunt.*”

“ *Ita*” was Gorenflot's invariable answer as he patted his donkey.

“ You caress Panurge a great deal, good brother,” said the prior ; “ are you longing to travel again ? ”

" Oh ! " Gorenflot would answer with a sigh.

The fact is that Gorenflot was tormented by memories. He had first left his convent with great reluctance ; but he discovered in his exile infinite and unknown joys, the source of which is freedom. In the midst of his happiness he felt this longing for freedom,—freedom with Chicot, that gay companion whom he loved without knowing why ; perhaps because Chicot beat him from time to time.

" Alas ! " timidly said a young brother who had followed the play of Gorenflot's features, " I think you are right, worthy prior, and that convent life is burdensome to him."

" Not exactly," said Gorenflot ; " but I feel that I am born to lead a life of activity in the midst of political struggles and campaigns."

As he spoke these words Gorenflot's eyes sparkled. He was thinking of Chicot's omelets, of the wine of Anjou in Maître Claude Bonhomet's cellar, and of the public-room of the Corne d'Abondance.

Since the night of the League, or rather, since the morning which followed his return to the convent, he had not been allowed to go out ; since the king had appointed himself chief of the Union, the Leaguers acted with great reserve. Gorenflot was so simple-minded that he had not even thought of taking advantage of his position to have the door opened. He had been told, " Brother, you are forbidden to go out," and he had not gone. No one suspected this inward fire which caused the happiness of the convent to weigh upon him.

But as his sadness daily increased, the prior said to him one morning, —

" Dear brother, no one should fight against his vocation. Yours is to fight for Christ. Go, then, and fulfil the mission for which the Lord has sent you, only be careful of your precious life and return for the great day."

" What great day ? " asked Gorenflot, absorbed in his joy.

" That of the Fête Dieu."

" Ita," said the monk, with an air of profound wisdom ;

" but," added Gorenflot, " give me some money that I may bestow alms in a Christian manner."

The prior hastened to fetch a large purse, which he opened. Gorenflot plunged in his great hand.

" You will see what I shall bring back to the convent," he said, as he transferred to his own the contents of the prior's purse.

" You have the text, have you not, dear brother ? "

" Yes, certainly."

" Confide it to me."

" Willingly ; but to you alone."

The prior approached Gorenflot and listened attentively.

" ' The flail which beats the corn beats itself,' " said the monk.

" Oh, magnificent ! oh, sublime ! " cried the prior while all the others, sharing his enthusiasm, repeated with him, " Magnificent ! sublime ! "

" And now, Reverend Father, am I free ? " humbly asked Gorenflot.

" Yes, my son ; go and walk in the path of the Lord."

Gorenflot saddled Panurge, mounted him with the aid of two vigorous monks, and left the convent at about seven o'clock in the evening. It was the same day on which Saint-Luc arrived from Méridor. The news from Anjou held Paris in a state of ferment.

Gorenflot, after having followed the Rue Saint-Étienne had just turned to the right and passed the Jacobins when Panurge started suddenly. A heavy hand had been laid on his back.

" Who is there ? " cried Gorenflot, frightened.

" A friend," replied a voice which Gorenflot thought he recognized. The monk was very anxious to turn round but, like the sailors who must get accustomed to the motion of the ship every time they go to sea, every time he mounted his ass it took some time for him to find his centre of gravity.

" What do you want ? " he asked.

" Worthy monk, would you kindly show me the way to the Corne d'Abondance ? " replied the voice.

" *Morbleu !* it is M. Chicot in person ! " cried Gorenlot, with delight.

" Exactly, " replied the Gascon. " I was going to seek you at the convent when I saw you come out. I followed you for some time, as I would not compromise myself by being seen talking to you. But now that we are alone, how are you ? *Ventre de biche !* I think you have grown thin ! "

" And you, M. Chicot, have grown fat."

" I think we are flattering each other."

" What have you there, M. Chicot ? " asked the monk ; " you seem laden."

" I have a haunch of venison which I have stolen from his Majesty, " said the Gascon ; " we shall have it cooked."

" Dear M. Chicot ! " cried the monk. " And under the other arm ? "

" A flask of Cyprus wine sent by another king to my king."

" Let me see, " said Gorenlot.

" That is the wine I love. Do you not like it, worthy brother ? " asked Chicot, opening his cloak.

" Oh, oh, " cried Gorenlot, jumping about in such glee that Panurge bent beneath the load. In his joy, the monk raised his hands to heaven and in a voice which made the windows rattle, he sang to Panurge's accompaniment,—

" La musique a des appas,
Mais on ne fait que l'entendre,
Les fleurs ont le parfum tendre,
Mais l'odeur ne nourrit pas.
Sans que noire main y touche,
Un beau ciel flatte nos yeux ;
Mais la vie coule en la bouche,
Mais le vin se sent, se touche
Et se boit ; je l'aime mieux
Que musique, fleurs et cieux."

It was the first time he had sung for a month.

CHAPTER LXXIV

HOW MONSOREAU AND DIANE JOURNEYED TO PARIS.

LET us leave the two friends at the Corne d'Abondance (whither, as the reader may have observed, Chicot never conducted Gorenflot without intentions which the poor monk was far from suspecting) and let us return to M. de Monsoreau, who was travelling to Paris in his litter, and to Bussy, who had left Angers with the intention of following the same road.

It is not difficult for a well-mounted rider to overtake foot travellers, and he even runs the risk of passing them. This happened to Bussy.

It was towards the end of May and the heat was great, particularly about noon. M. de Monsoreau ordered a halt in a little wood which was near the road ; and as he wished M. le Duc d'Anjou to remain as long as possible in ignorance of his departure, he saw that his whole suite entered the thicket, where they remained until the heat of the day was over ; and as they had a horse laden with provisions there was no necessity to go to an inn.

During this time, Bussy passed them. But as we may imagine, he did not travel without inquiring if horses and riders and a litter carried by peasants had been seen. Until he reached the village of Durtal, he obtained positive and satisfactory information ; and certain that Diane was before him, he went on very slowly, rising in his stirrups at the top of each hill, in the hope of perceiving the party he was following.

But all information suddenly ceased ; the traveller whom he met had seen no one, and on reaching La Flèche he became convinced that instead of following, he was now preceding. He then remembered the little wood he had passed and understood why his horse had neighed and sniffed the air as they rode by.

He made up his mind at once, and put up at the wors-

nn of the street, after having seen that his horse would be well attended to (he was more careful of it than of himself, for he knew he must be able to rely on its strength in case of necessity) ; then he settled himself near a window, carefully concealed behind the strip of cloth that served as a curtain. Bussy had been guided in his choice by the fact that this tavern was situated directly opposite the best hostelry in the town, and he did not doubt that Monsoreau would stop there. He had guessed rightly. Towards four o'clock there came a courier who stopped at the door of the inn. Half an hour later came the rest of the party, composed of the count, countess, Rémy, and Gertrude, and of eight carriers who were relayed at every five leagues. The courier's duty was to prepare these relays of peasants.

Now, as Monsoreau was too jealous not to be generous, his mode of travelling suffered neither difficulty nor delay.

The principal travellers entered the hostelry one after the other ; Diane was the last, and Bussy thought she glanced anxiously around. His first impulse was to show himself, but he had the courage to repress it ; the slightest imprudence might ruin them.

Night came ; Bussy hoped that during the night Rémy might come out or Diane might show herself at some window, so he wrapped himself up in his cloak and went down into the street. He waited there until nine o'clock ; at that hour the courier left the inn, and five minutes later eight men approached the door ; four of them entered.

“ Oh,” said Bussy to himself, “ are they going to travel by night ? That would be an excellent idea on the part of M. de Monsoreau.”

All concurred for the plausibility of this supposition,—the night was balmy and the stars shone brightly ; a soft breeze, laden with freshness and perfumes, cooled the air. The litter came out first, followed by Diane, Rémy, and Gertrude on horseback. Diane looked around, but the count called her and she was obliged to go beside his

litter. The four men for the relay walked on either side of the road with lighted torches.

"Good!" said Bussy, "had I commanded the details of this march, I could not have done better." He returned to his inn, saddled his horse, and set out in pursuit of the travellers.

This time there was no danger of his taking the wrong road and losing sight of them; the torches clearly indicated the direction they followed. Monsoreau scarcely allowed Diane to move from his side. He talked to her, or rather, scolded her. Her visit to the conservatory served as a text for innumerable comments and malicious questions.

Rémy and Gertrude sulked, or rather, Rémy reflected and Gertrude sulked. The cause of this behavior could be easily explained. Rémy no longer found it necessary to be in love with Gertrude since Diane was in love with Bussy.

The *cortège* advanced, some disputing, others sulking. At last Bussy, who followed the cavalcade at a safe distance, gave a long shrill whistle with which he was in the habit of summoning his attendants in the *hôtel* of the Rue de Grenelle-Saint-Honoré, and thus notified Rémy of his presence. This sound, which always echoed from one end of the house to the other, would bring men and beasts, at the call. We say men and beasts, because Bussy, like all strong men, took pleasure in training fighting dogs, wild horses, and falcons. Now, at the sound of this whistle, the dogs started in their kennels, the horses in their stalls and the falcons on their perches. Rémy recognized it at once. Diane started, and looked at the young man, who nodded in the affirmative. As he passed beside her, he whispered,—

"It is he."

"What is it?" asked Monsoreau. "Who was speaking to you, madame?"

"To me? No one, monsieur."

"Yes, I saw a shadow and I heard a voice."

"The voice was Monsieur Rémy's," replied Diane. "Are you also jealous of him?"

" No, but I prefer that those around me should speak aloud ; it would amuse me."

" There are certain things which cannot be said aloud before Monsieur le Comte," said Gertrude, coming to the rescue.

" Why so ? "

" For two reasons."

" What are they ? "

" Because the things either do not interest Monsieur le Comte or interest him too much."

" And of which kind were the things which Monsieur Rémy has just whispered to Madame ? "

" Of the kind which interest Monsieur too much."

" What was Rémy saying to you, madame ? I must know."

" I was saying, Monsieur le Comte, that if you excite yourself in this way, you will be dead before you have gone one third of the way."

By the pale light of the torches, Monsoreau was seen to grow deadly white. Diane, breathless and pensive, was silent.

" He is waiting for you behind," said Rémy, in a scarcely audible voice ; " ride slowly and he will overtake you."

Rémy had spoken so low that Monsoreau heard only a murmur ; he made an effort, threw back his head, and saw Diane riding near.

" Another movement like that, Monsieur le Comte," said Rémy, " and you will bring on a hemorrhage."

Diane had now become courageous. Her love had given birth to that audacity which a woman truly in love usually carries beyond the limits of prudence. She turned her horse's head and waited.

At the same moment, Rémy dismounted, threw his bridle to Gertrude, and approached the litter to occupy the sick man's attention.

" Let me feel your pulse," he said ; " I am sure you have fever."

Five seconds later Bussy was beside Diane. They

needed no speech to understand each other, and remained for some moments locked in a tender embrace.

“ You see,” said Bussy, who was the first to break the silence, “ that when you go, I follow you.”

“ Oh, Bussy, what happiness for me in the days and nights if I know that you are near ! ”

“ But by day he will see us.”

“ No, you will follow from a distance, and I alone shall see you, my Louis. At the turn of the road or the top of a hill your waving plume or your handkerchief floating in the breeze will speak to me in your name and tell me that you love me. If at the fall of day I can see your shadow bend to send me a kiss, I shall be so happy.”

“ Speak on, my beloved Diane ; you do not know what harmony there is in the sound of your voice.”

“ And when we travel by night,—which we shall often do, for Rémy told him that the night air would cool the fever of his wounds,—I can sometimes stay behind as I am doing now ; from time to time, I shall be able to press you in my arms and tell you how I shall have thought of you all day.”

“ Oh, how I love you ! how I love you ! ” murmured Bussy.

“ Do you know,” said Diane, “ I think our souls are so closely united that even at a distance, without speaking or even seeing each other, we can be happy in our thoughts.”

“ Oh, yes ; but to be near you, to see you, and hold you in my arms,—oh, Diane ! Diane ! ”

The horses came together, while their silver-mounted bridles jingled, and the two lovers forgot the world in a long embrace. Suddenly was heard a voice which made them both start, Diane with fear and Bussy with anger.

“ Madame Diane ! ” it cried. “ Where are you ? Answer.”

This call sounded through the air like a death-knell.

“ Oh, it is he ! I had forgotten him,” murmured

Diane. "It is he; I was dreaming; sweet dream and bitter awakening."

"Listen!" cried Bussy, "listen, Diane; we are together. Speak but one word and nothing can separate us. Let us fly. What prevents us? Before us is happiness and liberty. One word, and we shall go: one word, and you are lost to him and belong to me forever."

The young man was gently holding her.

"And my father?"

"When the baron will know how I love you,—" he murmured.

"Oh, a father? What are you saying there?"

This single word recalled Bussy to himself.

"I will do nothing by violence, dear Diane," he said. "Order, and I shall obey."

"Listen," said Diane, "our destiny is there; let us be stronger than the demon who persecutes us. Fear nothing, and you will see if I know how to love."

"Must we then separate?"

"Countess," cried the voice, "answer or I will jump from this infernal litter, even if it kill me to do so."

"Adieu," said Diane; "he would do it and kill himself."

"You pity him?"

"Jealous!" said Diane, with an adorable smile.

Bussy let her go. In two bounds she had reached the litter, and found the count half fainting.

"Stop!" he murmured, "stop!"

"*Morbleu!*" said Rémy, "do not stop, he is mad; if he wishes to kill himself, let him."

And the litter went on.

"After whom are you crying?" said Gertrude. "Madame is here, beside me. Come, madame, speak to him; Monsieur le Comte is surely delirious."

Diane, without uttering a word, entered the circle of light.

"Ah," said Monsoreau, exhausted, "where were you?"

"Where could I be, monsieur, if not behind you?"

"At my side, madame; and do not leave me again."

Diane had no other motive for remaining behind ; she knew that Bussy was following her. Had there been any moonlight, she could have seen him.

They reached a halting-place. Monsoreau rested a few hours, and wished to go on. He was anxious, not to reach Paris, but to be far from Angers. From time to time, the scene we have just described was renewed. Rémy said to himself,—

“ If he dies of rage, the physician’s honor will be safe.”

But Monsoreau did not die ; on the contrary, at the end of ten days, they reached Paris and he was much better. Rémy was positively a very able physician, more so even than he wished.

During these ten days Diane had gradually demolished all Bussy’s great pride. She had urged him to visit Monsoreau and take advantage of the latter’s friendship for him. He had an excuse for his visit,—the count’s health about which he came to inquire. Rémy attended the husband and carried notes to the wife.

“ Æsculapius and Mercury,” he said ; “ my functions are complex.”

CHAPTER LXXV.

HOW THE DUC D’ANJOU’S AMBASSADOR REACHED PARIS, AND THE RECEPTION HE MET WITH.

IN the meantime, neither Catherine nor the Duc d’Anjou appeared at the Louvre, and the report of a dissension between the two brothers became every day more important. The king had received no message from his mother, and instead of believing, according to the proverb, “ No news, good news,” he shook his head and said, “ No news, bad news.”

The favorites added : “ François, ill-advised, must have kept your mother.”

François, ill-advised. In fact, all the singular policy of

this singular reign and of the three preceding ones could be summed up in these words : Ill-advised was King Charles IX. when he had—if not ordered—at least authorized the massacre of Saint-Bartholomew. Ill-advised was Francis II. when he ordered the massacre of Amboise. Ill-advised was Henri II., the father of this perverted race, when he burned so many heretics and conspirators before he was killed by Montgomery, who was also said to have been ill-advised when his lance penetrated so awkwardly beneath the king's visor : no one dared say to the king :

“ Your brother has bad blood in his veins ; he is trying, according to the custom in your family, to dethrone or poison you ; he wishes to do to you what you did to your elder brother, what your elder brother did to his, and what your mother taught you all to do to one another.”

No, a king in those days, particularly in the sixteenth century, would have taken these remarks for insults ; for a king was a man in those days ; civilization alone has been able to make of him a fac-simile of God like Louis XIV., or an irresponsible myth like a constitutional king.

The favorites therefore said to Henri III.—

“ Sire, your brother is ill-advised.”

And as there was only one person possessing the power and mind to advise François, it was against Bussy that the storm was raised, and was becoming each day more violent. The public councils were seeking modes of intimidation, and the privy councils were seeking modes of extermination, when the news suddenly came that the Duc d'Anjou was sending an ambassador.

Whence came this report ? Who carried it and spread it ? It would be as easy to say that as to say how the clouds of dust are raised on the plains or the whirlwinds of noise in the cities.

There is a demon who puts wings to certain reports and lets them fly through space like eagles. When this one reached the Louvre, it produced a general conflagration. The king became pale with anger, and the courtiers, who always exaggerated their master's passions, became livid.

They swore. It would be difficult to say all they swore, but they swore among other things, that if the ambassador were an old man he would be scoffed at, derided, and thrown into the Bastille. If he were a young man he would be cut into small pieces, which would be sent to all the provinces of France as a sample of the royal anger.

The favorites, according to their custom, polished their swords, took fencing lessons, and buried their daggers in the wall. Chicot left his sword in its scabbard, his dagger in its sheath, and began to reflect. The king, seeing Chicot reflect, and remembering that Chicot had once been of the same opinion as the queen-mother on a subject of great moment, and that this opinion had been justified by events, understood that the wisdom of the kingdom was embodied in Chicot, and he questioned him.

"Sire," he replied, after mature reflection, "Monseigneur the Duc d'Anjou will either send an ambassador, or will not send one."

"*Pardieu !*" said the king, "what was the use of burying your fist in your cheek to find this dilemma ?"

"Patience, patience, as your august mother is always saying in the language of Machiavelli."

"You see that I have some, since I am listening to you."

"If he send you an ambassador, it is because he thinks he can do it ; if he, who is prudence itself, think he can do it, it is a proof that he feels himself strong. Therefore, you must temporize with him. We must respect powers and deceive them, but we must not play with them ; we must receive their ambassador and show great pleasure at seeing him. That means nothing at all. You remember how your brother Charles IX. embraced that good Admiral Coligny who came as an ambassador from the Huguenots, who also thought themselves a power ?"

"Then you approve of the policy of my brother Charles IX. ?"

"Not at all ; I am simply giving an example. If, later on, you find means, not of hurting a poor devil of an

ambassador, or envoy, but of seizing the master, the motor, the chief, the high and mighty prince, Monseigneur the Duc d'Anjou, the real and only culprit, together with the three Guises, and locking them up in a fortress stronger than the Louvre, do so by all means."

"I like this beginning," said Henri III.

"*Peste!* you are not hard to please. I shall continue."

"Go on."

"But if he should not send an ambassador, why do you allow all your friends to bellow?"

"Bellow?"

"You understand. I would say roar if there was any way of comparing them to lions. I say bellow—because—Come, Henri, it makes me ill to see these fellows—more bearded than the monkeys of your menagerie—playing ghost like little boys and trying to frighten men by crying, 'Hoo, hoo,' without counting that if the Duc d'Anjou send no one, they will imagine it is on their account, and think themselves great personages."

"Chicot, you forget that the persons of whom you speak are my friends, my only friends."

"Will you let me win a thousand crowns from you, oh, king?" asked Chicot.

"Speak."

"Bet with me that these fellows will remain faithful through every trial, and I will bet that before to-morrow night I will have gained over three of the four, body and soul."

Chicot's assurance made the king reflect. He did not reply.

"Ah!" said Chicot, "so you too are thinking, and burying your charming fist in your pretty mouth. You are more clever than I thought, my son, for you are beginning to see the truth."

"Then what do you advise me to do?"

"Wait. Half of Solomon's wisdom lies in that word. If an ambassador should come, receive him well; if no one come, do as you choose, but believe me, do not sacrifice your brother to your scamps. *Cordieu!* I know he

is a great rascal, but he is a Valois. Kill him if you like, but for the honor of the name, do not disgrace him ; he is attending very diligently to that himself."

" That is true, Chicot."

" One more lesson that you owe me. Fortunately we do not keep account. Now let me sleep, Henri. A week ago I found it necessary to intoxicate a monk, and when I perform such feats I am tipsy for a week."

" Is it that good monk of Sainte-Genevieve of whom you have already spoken ? "

" Exactly ; you promised him an abbey."

" I ? "

" *Pardieu !* it is the least you might do for him after all he did for you."

" Is he still devoted to me ? "

" He adores you. By the way, my son."

" What ? "

" The Fête Dieu is in three weeks."

" Well ? "

" I hope you are preparing some nice little procession."

" I am the most Christian king, and it is my duty to give my people the example of religion."

" And you will stop as usual in all the great convents of Paris ? "

" Yes."

" At the Abbey of Sainte-Genevieve ? "

" No doubt ; it is the second one I intend to visit. But why do you ask ? "

" Oh, nothing ! I was only curious. Now, I know what I wanted. Good-night, Henri."

At this moment, as Chicot was preparing to take a nap, a great noise was heard in the Louvre.

" What is this ? " asked the king.

" Come," said Chicot, " it is said that I shall not sleep, Henri."

" Well ? "

" My son, you must rent a room for me, or I shall leave you. Upon my word, the Louvre has become uninhabitable."

At this moment, the captain of the guards entered. He looked very frightened.

“What is it?” asked the king.

“Sire,” replied the captain, “it is the Duc d’Anjou’s envoy who is dismounting at the gate.”

“With a suite?”

“No, all alone.”

“Then you must receive him doubly well, Henri, for he is a brave man.”

“Come,” said the king, whose face was pale, though he tried to look calm, “assemble my whole court in the great hall, and let me dress in black. One must dress in mourning to treat with one’s brother through an ambassador.”

CHAPTER LXXVI.

WHICH IS ONLY THE CONTINUATION OF THE LAST.

KING HENRI III.’s throne was in the great hall. Around this throne was an excited and tumultuous throng. The king took his seat, sad and frowning. All eyes were turned towards the gallery, through which the captain of the guards was to introduce the envoy.

“Sire,” whispered Quélus, in the king’s ear, “do you know the name of the ambassador?”

“No, what do I care?!”

“Sire, it is M. de Bussy. Is not the insult trebled?”

“I do not see any insult,” said Henri, trying to be calm.

“Your Majesty may not see it,” said Schomberg, “but we see it.”

Henri did not reply. He felt anger and hatred at work around his throne, and congratulated himself on being able to place two barriers of this strength between himself and his enemies.

Quélus, growing alternately red and pale, had placed both hands on the hilt of his sword. Schomberg took off his gloves, and drew his dagger half out of the sheath. Maugiron took his sword, which was held by a page, and

fastened it to his belt ; D'Eperron twirled his moustache, and stood behind his companions. As for Henri, like a hunter who hears his dogs barking at a boar, he let his favorites do as they would and smiled.

" Let the ambassador enter," he said.

At these words, a deathlike silence reigned throughout the room, and it almost seemed as if the dull murmur of the king's wrath could be heard. Then a quick, firm step was heard, and the spurs jingled proudly on the marble floor. Bussy entered with head erect, and a calm countenance, holding his hat in his hand.

He advanced directly to Henri, made a profound bow, and waited to be questioned, standing proudly before the throne, but with a pride wholly personal,—the pride of a gentleman, not at all offensive to the Royal Majesty.

" You here, M. de Bussy ? I believed you to be in the depths of Anjou."

" Sire," said Bussy, " I was there, but I have returned as you see."

" And what brought you to our capital ? "

" The desire of presenting my humble respects to your Majesty."

The king and the favorites looked at one another. They evidently expected something else from the impetuous young man.

" And—nothing more ? " said the king.

" I will add, sire, the orders I received from his Highness, Monseigneur the Duc d'Anjou, to join his respects to mine."

" And the duke said nothing else ? "

" He told me that being on the point of returning with the queen-mother, he wished me to apprise your Majesty of the return of one of his most faithful subjects."

The king, almost suffocated by surprise, could not continue his questions. Chicot took advantage of the interruption to approach the ambassador.

" How do you do, M. de Bussy ? " he asked.

Bussy turned round, surprised to find a friend in that assembly.

" Ah ! Monsieur Chicot, I greet you with all my heart," he replied. " How is M. de Saint-Luc ? "

" Very well ; he is now walking near the aviary with his wife."

" And this is all you had to say to me, M. de Bussy ? " asked the king.

" Yes, sire, if there is anything else of importance, Monseigneur the Duc d'Anjou will have the honor of telling you himself."

" Very well," said the king, and rising silently from his throne he descended the two steps. The audience was at an end ; the groups broke up. Bussy noticed out of the corner of his eye that he was surrounded by the four favorites, and almost locked in a living circle full of agitation and menace.

At the end of the hall the king was conversing in a low tone with his chancellor. Bussy pretended to see nothing, and continued to converse with Chicot ; but the king called him away as if he too were in the plot to isolate Bussy.

" Come here, Chicot," he said, " I have something to tell you."

Chicot saluted Bussy with great courtesy, and Bussy bowed in return with no less elegance, and remained alone within the circle. Then he changed his expression ; he had been calm with the king, polite with Chicot ; he now became gracious, seeing Quélus approach.

" Ah, how are you, M. de Quélus ? " he said to him ; " may I have the honor of asking you how your household is ? "

" Not very well, monsieur," replied Quélus.

" Ah, *mon Dieu !*" said Bussy, as though this reply grieved him personally ; " what has happened ? "

" There is something which greatly annoys us," replied Quélus.

" Something ? " asked Bussy, in astonishment, " are you not sufficiently powerful to rid yourself of this something ? "

" Pardon me, monsieur," said Maugiron, pushing aside

Schomberg who had advanced to take part in this conversation which promised to be interesting, "it is not something but some one that M. de Quélus means."

"If there is some one in M. de Quélus' way, let him push him aside as you have done."

"I have given him the same advice, M. de Bussy," said Schomberg, "and I think he has made up his mind to follow it."

"Ah, is this you, M. de Schomberg? I did not have the honor of recognizing you."

"Perhaps not; is my face still blue?"

"No, you are, on the contrary, very pale; are you in poor health, monsieur?"

"Monsieur," said Schomberg, "if I am pale, it is with anger."

"Ah, so you are like M. de Quélus, annoyed by something or some one?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"Like me," said Maugiron. "I too have some one who annoys me."

"Always witty, my dear M. de Maugiron," said Bussy, "but the more I look at you, the more concerned I am about your preoccupied expressions."

"You forget me, monsieur," said D'Epernon, proudly planting himself before Bussy.

"Pardon me, M. d'Epernon, you were behind the others, according to your habit, and I have so little the pleasure of knowing you that it was not my place to speak first."

It was a curious sight to see Bussy's smile and his unconcerned manner, placed as he was between these four madmen, whose eyes spoke with only too much eloquence, and he must have been blind or stupid who did not understand their meaning; but Bussy seemed not to understand. He remained silent with the same smile on his lips.

"Well," said Quélus, who was the first to lose his patience, and stamped with his foot. Bussy raised his eyes to the ceiling and looked around him.

"Monsieur," he said, "do you notice the echo in this room? Nothing reverberates the sound like marble walls, though the voices are doubly sonorous beneath arches of stucco; on the contrary, on a plain the sound divides itself, and, on my honor, I believe the clouds take their share. I advance this proposition according to Aristophanes. Have you read Aristophanes, gentlemen?"

Maugiron thought he understood Bussy's invitation, and approached the young man to whisper in his ear; but Bussy stopped him.

"No confidences here, monsieur, I beg of you," he said. "You know that his Majesty is jealous, and would believe that we are gossiping."

Maugiron went away, more furious than ever. Schomberg took his place, and said in a pompous tone,—

"I am a German, very heavy, very obtuse, but very frank; I speak loud, that those who listen may have every chance of hearing. But when my words, which I try to make clear, are not understood by the one to whom they are addressed, or when that one is deaf, because he does not wish to hear, then I—"

"You?" asked Bussy, fixing on the young man one of those looks that the tigers send forth from their fathomless orbs, those looks that seem to well up from an abyss and shed torrents of fire, "you—"

Schomberg stopped. Bussy shrugged his shoulders and turned on his heel. He found himself face to face with D'Epernon; D'Epernon was started and could not possibly withdraw.

"See, gentlemen," he said, "how provincial M. de Bussy has become during the expedition he has just made with the Duc d'Anjou; he wears his beard and has no bow on his sword; he has black boots and a gray felt hat."

"I was making the same reflection, my dear M. d'Epernon. When I saw you so well dressed, I asked myself where absence could lead a man. Here am I, Louis de Bussy, lord of Clermont, obliged to take a little Gascon

gentleman as a model of taste. But will you please let me pass ? You are so near me that you have stepped on my foot, and so has M. de Quélus whom I felt through my boots," he added with a charming smile, and passing between D'Epernon and Quélus, he held out his hand to Saint-Luc who had just entered. Saint-Luc found this hand dripping with perspiration. He understood that something extraordinary was taking place, and dragged Bussy away from the group, then out of the room.

A strange murmur arose among the favorites and spread through the other groups of courtiers.

" It is incredible," said Quélus ; " I insulted him and he did not reply."

" I provoked him," said Maugiron, " and he did not reply."

" I raised my hand on a level with his face," said Schomberg, " and he did not reply."

" I stepped on his foot," cried D'Epernon, " and he did not reply," and he seemed to grow the length of Bussy's foot.

" It is clear that he did not wish to hear," said Quélus ; " there is something under that."

" There is," said Schomberg, " and I know what it is."

" What is it ? "

" He feels that we four will kill him, and he does not wish to be killed."

At this moment the king approached the four young men, while Chicot whispered in his ear.

" Well," said the king, " what was M. de Bussy saying ? I heard loud talking in this corner."

" You wish to know what M. de Bussy was saying, sire ? " asked D'Epernon.

" Yes, you know that I am curious," replied Henri, with a smile.

" Faith, nothing good," said Quélus ; " he is no longer a Parisian."

" What is he ? "

" A countryman ; he is reforming."

" Oh, oh ! " said the king, " what does this mean ? "

" It means that I am going to train a dog to bite his legs," said Quélus, " and who knows if he will even feel it through his boots."

" I," said D'Epernon, " will go straighter and further. To-day, I stepped on his foot. To-morrow, I shall slap his face. He is a sham hero, a hero of vanity who says to himself, ' I have fought enough for honor, now I wish to be prudent for life.' "

" What, gentlemen," said Henri, with feigned anger, " do you dare to ill-treat here in my house a gentleman of my brother's suite ? "

" Alas, yes," said Maugiron, replying with feigned humility to the king's feigned anger ; " and though we treated him very ill, sire, I assure you he said nothing."

The king looked at Chicot with a smile, and leaning towards him,++

" Do you still think that they bellow, Chicot ? " he asked ; " I think they have roared."

" Eh ! " said Chicot, " they have perhaps mewed. I know people whose nerves are horribly affected by the cry of a cat. M. de Bussy may be one of those people, and that is why he went out without replying."

" You think so ? "

" Those who live will see," replied Chicot, sententiously.

" Come now," said Henri, " like master, like man."

" If you mean to say that Bussy is your brother's servant, you are very much mistaken, sire."

" Gentlemen," said the king, " I dine with the queen ; later in the evening the *Gelosi*¹ are coming to play a farce, and I invite you all to come."

The assembly bowed respectfully, and the king went out through the large door. At the same moment Saint-Luc entered through the small door. He made a sign to the four gentlemen who were about to go out.

" Pardon me, M. de Quélus," he said, with a bow, " do you still reside on the Rue Saint-Honoré ? "

¹ Italian Comedians who gave performances at the Hôtel de Bourgogne.

“ Yes, my dear friend, why do you ask ? ”

“ I have a few words to say to you.”

“ Ah, ah ! ”

“ And you, M. de Schomberg, may I inquire for your address ? ”

“ I live on the Rue Béthisy,” replied Schomberg with surprise.

“ I know yours, D'Epernon.”

“ Rue de Grenelle.”

“ You are my neighbor, and you, Maugiron ? ”

“ Near the Louvre.”

“ I shall therefore begin with you ; or, rather, no—with Quélus.”

“ Ah, I think I understand. You come from M. de Bussy.”

“ I do not say from whom I come, gentlemen ; I wish to speak to you, that is all.”

“ To all four ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ Well, if as I presume, you do not wish to speak to us in the Louvre, we can all go to the house of one of us. May we not all hear what you have to say to each one ? ”

“ Perfectly.”

“ Let us go to Schomberg's, on the Rue Béthisy. It is the nearest.”

“ Very well, gentlemen,” said Saint-Luc, and he bowed again.

“ Show us the way, M. de Schomberg.”

“ Willingly.”

The five gentlemen left the Louvre arm-in-arm, and took up the whole width of the street. Behind them came their attendants, armed to the teeth. They reached the *hôtel*, and Schomberg ordered the main hall to be opened.

Saint-Luc stopped in the ante-chamber.

CHAPTER LXXVII.

HOW M. DE SAINT-LUC ACQUITTED HIMSELF OF THE COMMISSION GIVEN HIM BY BUSSY.

LET us leave Saint-Luc for a while in Schomberg's ante-chamber, and see what had taken place between him and Bussy.

Bussy had left the audience chamber with his friend, bowing to those who, despite the wind of court favor, would not neglect so powerful a man as Bussy. In those days when brute force or personal power were everything, a man, if he were strong and clever, could make for himself a little physical and moral kingdom in that beautiful land of France. Thus it was that Bussy reigned at the court of King Henri III. But that day he had not been warmly welcomed in his kingdom.

Once out of the hall, Saint-Luc stopped and looked anxiously at his friend.

"Are you ill?" he asked; "you are so pale that you look as if you were about to faint."

"No," said Bussy, "I am only choking with anger."

"Do you pay any attention to the remarks of those fellows?"

"*Corbleu!* you shall see if I do."

"Come, Bussy, be calm."

"You are charming with your injunctions. If you had heard half of the things I have had said to me, there would have been a dead man ere this."

"Well, what do you wish?"

"You are my friend, Saint-Luc, and you have given me a terrible proof of this friendship."

"Ah, my dear friend," said Saint-Luc, who believed Monsoreau dead and buried, "that was a mere trifle for which I deserve no thanks. The thrust was surely a neat one and succeeded admirably; but I deserve no praise, for the king showed it to me while he kept me prisoner at the Louvre."

“ My dear friend—”

“ Let us leave Monsoreau where he is, and speak of Diane. Was she a little pleased ? Has she forgiven me ? When is the wedding to take place ? ”

“ Oh, my dear friend, we must wait for Monsoreau’s death.”

“ What ? ” cried Saint-Luc, starting up as if he had walked on a sharp nail.

“ Poppies are not so dangerous as you had first thought, and he did not at all die from his fall on them. On the contrary, he is alive and more furious than ever.”

“ What, really ? ”

“ Yes, he thinks of nothing but his vengeance, and has sworn to kill you at the earliest opportunity.”

“ So he lives ? ”

“ Alas, yes ! ”

“ And who then is the ass of a physician who cured him ? ”

“ Mine, dear friend.”

“ What ? I cannot get over it,” replied Saint-Luc, crushed by this revelation. “ Why, I am dishonored, *ventrebleu* ! I had announced his death to all, and he will find his heirs in mourning. Oh, but he shall not give me the lie. I shall find him again, and instead of one sword thrust, he shall have four if necessary.”

“ Calm yourself in turn, my dear Saint-Luc,” said Bussy. “ Monsoreau serves me better than you think. I imagine that he suspects the duke of having despatched you against him ; it is the duke of whom he is jealous. I am an angel, a precious friend, a Bayard ; I am his dear Bussy. That is most natural, for it was that fool Rémy who cured him.”

“ What a stupid idea that was ! ”

“ What will you have ? It is the idea of an honest man. He imagines that because he is a physician he must cure people.”

“ The fellow is visionary.”

“ In short, he pretends that he owes me his life, and confides his wife to my care.”

" Ah ! I understand that under the circumstances you should await his death with more patience, but nevertheless I am completely amazed."

" Dear friend."

" Upon my honor, I cannot realize it."

" You see that for the moment I am not thinking of M. de Monsoreau."

" No, let us enjoy life while he is still wounded. But the moment he becomes convalescent, I warn you that I shall order a coat of mail, and have iron blinds put to my windows. You might ask the Duc d'Anjou if his good mother has not given him some antidote. In the meanwhile let us have a good time."

Bussy could not help smiling ; he passed his arm through Saint-Luc's.

" So you see, my dear Saint-Luc, you have rendered me only half a service."

Saint-Luc looked at him in surprise.

" Very true," he said, " would you like me to finish him up ? That would be rather hard ; but for you, my dear Bussy, I would do a great deal, particularly if he looks at me with his yellow eye."

" No ; as I said before, let us not think of Monsoreau. If you owe me anything I wish you would make some other use of it."

" Speak, I am listening."

" Are you on very good terms with those favorites ? "

" Faith, we are something like cats and dogs in the sun : as long as the same ray heats us all we say nothing ; but let one try to take more than his share of light and heat, and I do not answer for the consequences. Teeth and claws would be brought into play."

" I am delighted to hear you speak in this way."

" So much the better."

" Let us admit that the ray of light has been intercepted."

" Very well."

" Now show your white teeth and long claws, and let us open the game."

"I do not understand."

Bussy smiled.

"Will you go to M. de Quélus for me?"

"Ah, ah," said Saint-Luc.

"Are you beginning to understand?"

"Yes."

"Very well. Will you ask him what day he would be pleased to cut my throat, or allow me to cut his?"

"I shall do so."

"You do not object?"

"Not in the least. I shall go at once if you like."

"Wait a second. On your way to M. de Quélus, will you make the same proposition to M. de Schomberg?"

"Ah, ah," said Saint-Luc, "to M. de Schomberg, too? The devil! how you go on."

Bussy made a gesture which admitted of no reply.

"Very well," said Saint-Luc, "your wishes shall be obeyed."

"Then, my dear Saint-Luc," replied Bussy, "since you are so amiably disposed, you will go to the Louvre and speak to M. de Maugiron. I saw by his gorget that he is on duty to-day; will you ask him to join the other two?"

"Oh, oh," said Saint-Luc, "three; are you thinking of it, Bussy? Is that all?"

"No."

"How not?"

"From there you will go to M. d'Epernon. I need not lay much stress on him, because I do not consider him of great importance; but he will add to the number."

Saint-Luc let his arms fall, and stared at Bussy.

"Four!" he murmured.

"Exactly, dear friend," said Bussy, nodding his head; "it is needless to recommend to a man of your breeding to proceed with all the politeness and courtesy which you possess to such a degree."

Saint-Luc bowed.

“ I rely on you to do it in gallant fashion.”

“ You shall be satisfied.”

Bussy held out his hand to Saint-Luc.

“ Very well ; now, gentlemen, it will be our turn to laugh.”

“ Now, dear friend, what are your conditions ? ”

“ I make none ; I shall accept theirs.”

“ Your arms ? ”

“ The arms of those gentlemen.”

“ The time and place—”

“ Which they shall appoint.”

“ But still—”

“ Let us leave these trifles ; go quickly. I shall wander in the little garden of the Louvre ; you will find me there on your return.”

“ Then you will wait ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ I may be a long while.”

“ I have time.”

We now know how Saint-Luc found the four young men in the audience chamber, and how he opened preliminaries. Let us therefore join him in the ante-chamber of Schomberg's *hôtel*, where in accordance with the laws of etiquette then in vogue, he waited, while the four favorites, who suspected the object of his visit, stationed themselves in the four corners of the room.

This having been done, the doors were opened wide, and Saint-Luc, with his left hand on the hilt of his sword and his hat in his right hand, appeared on the threshold, where he stopped.

“ M. d'Espinay de Saint-Luc ! ” cried the usher.

Saint-Luc entered. Schomberg, being the host, rose to meet his guest who, instead of bowing, placed his hat on his head. This formality gave color and intention to the visit. Schomberg replied with a bow, and, turning towards Quélus, said,—

“ I have the honor of presenting M. Jacques de Levis, comte de Quélus.”

Saint-Luc advanced towards Quélus and made a deep bow.

"I was seeking Monsieur," he said.

Schomberg then turned towards another corner of the room.

"I have the honor of presenting M. Louis de Maugiron."

Same salutation on the part of Saint-Luc, and same reply from Maugiron. The same ceremony was gone through for D'Epernon. Then Schomberg gave his own name and received the same compliment.

Having done this, the four friends resumed their seats, while Saint-Luc remained standing.

"Monsieur le Comte," he said to Quélus, "you have insulted M. le comte Louis de Clermont d'Amboise, lord of Bussy, who presents you his very humble respects, and challenges you to fight in single combat, on any day and hour, and with such weapons as you may select until death should follow. Do you accept?"

"Most certainly," calmly replied Quélus, "and M. de Bussy does me a great honor."

"What is your day, Monsieur le Comte?"

"I have no choice, only I prefer the earliest time."

"Your time?"

"The morning."

"Your weapons?"

"The dagger and sword, if M. de Bussy accepts these two instruments."

Saint-Luc bowed.

"All that you may decide is sure to be accepted by M. de Bussy." He then turned to Maugiron, who made the same replies, and passed on to the other two.

"But," said Schomberg, who being the host was the last one addressed, "we have not thought of one thing, M. de Saint-Luc."

"What is that?"

"If it should so happen that through some strange chance we all chose the same day and hour, M. de Bussy would be greatly embarrassed."

Saint-Luc bowed with his most courteous smile.

"Certainly," he said, "M. de Bussy would be embarrassed as every brave man should be, before four such gallant men as you ; but he says the case would not be a new one for him, as it already occurred at the Tournelles, near the Bastille."

"And he would fight us all four ?" asked D'Epernon.

"All four," replied Saint-Luc.

"Separately ?" asked Schomberg.

"Separately or together ; the challenge is at once individual or collective."

The four young men looked at one another. Quélus was the first to break the silence.

"This is very fine on the part of M. de Bussy," he said, purple with anger ; "but however little we may be worth, we can each attend to our business alone ; we shall accept the count's proposition, one after the other, or what would be even better—"

Quélus looked at his friends who understood him and nodded assent, so he continued,—

"As we are not trying to assassinate a brave man, chance shall decide which of us is to fight M. de Bussy."

"But the other three ?" quickly said D'Epernon.

"M. de Bussy has too many friends, as we have too many enemies, for the other three to remain idle. Do you agree to this ?" he asked, turning to his companions.

"Yes," was the unanimous reply.

"It would be very agreeable to me," said Schomberg, "if M. de Bussy would invite M. de Livarot to take part in this little game."

"If I may be allowed to express an opinion," said Maugiron, "I would like the company of M. Balzac d'Entragues."

"The party would be complete if M. de Ribeirac will accompany his friends," said Quélus.

"Gentlemen," replied Saint-Luc, "I shall transmit your wishes to M. de Bussy, who is too courteous not to satisfy them. I have but to thank you in Monsieur le Comte's name."

Saint-Luc bowed again, and the four gentlemen re-

turned his bow. They conducted Saint-Luc to the door. In the last ante-chamber he found the four lackeys assembled. He drew his purse full of gold and threw it to them.

“ This is to drink the health of your masters,” he said.

CHAPTER LXXVIII.

IN WHICH M. DE SAINT-LUC WAS MORE CIVILIZED THAN
M. DE BUSSY, THE LESSONS WHICH HE GAVE HIM AND
THE USE WHICH M. DE BUSSY MADE OF THEM.

SAINT-LUC returned very proud of the manner in which he had executed his commission. Bussy was waiting for him and thanked him. Saint-Luc found him very sad ; this was very unnatural for a man who had just received the news of a fine and brilliant duel.

“ Have I done wrong ? ” said Saint-Luc.

“ Really, my dear friend, I regret that you did not say, ‘ At once,’ instead of waiting for a delay.”

“ Have patience ; the Angevins have not yet returned. The devil ! give them time to come ; then, where is the necessity of surrounding yourself so soon with a heap of dead and dying ? ”

“ I would like to die as soon as possible.”

Saint-Luc looked at Bussy with that astonishment felt by all well-organized persons at the news of some strange misfortune.

“ Die ! at your age, with your name and your mistress ? ”

“ I am sure I shall kill four, and receive some good thrusts which will give me eternal peace.”

“ What gloomy thoughts, Bussy.”

“ I would like to see you in my place. A husband who was thought dead and who comes to life ; a wife who cannot leave the bedside of this dying man. Not to see her, smile on her, touch her hand ! *Mordieu !* I should like to have some one to tear to pieces—”

Saint-Luc replied to this by a burst of laughter which put to flight a flock of sparrows.

" Ah," he cried, " what an innocent man ! To think that women love this Bussy,—a tyro. But, my dear fellow, you are losing your senses ; there is no other lover so happy as you."

" Ah, very good ! prove that to me, married man."

" *Nihil facilius*, as the Jesuit Triquet, my pedagogue, used to say to me : you are M. de Monsoreau's friend."

" Yes ; for the honor of human intelligence I am ashamed to confess it ; that brute calls me his friend."

" Well, be his friend."

" Oh, and abuse that title."

" *Prorsus absurdum !* to quote Triquet. Is he really your friend ?"

" He says he is."

" No, since he makes you unhappy. Now the object of friendship is to make men happy through one another : at least, this is his Majesty's definition, and he is learned."

Bussy began to laugh.

" I continue," said Saint-Luc : " if he makes you unhappy you are not friends ; therefore, you may treat him either as an indifferent person and take his wife, or as an enemy and kill him if he does not like it."

" The fact is, I hate him," said Bussy.

" And he fears you."

" You think he does not like me ?"

" Well, try him. Take his wife and you will see."

" Is this still Father Triquet's logic ?"

" No, it is mine."

" I congratulate you."

" Does it satisfy you ?"

" No, I prefer being a man of honor."

" And let Madame de Monsoreau complete her husband's physical and moral cure ? Because, if you let yourself be killed, she will certainly devote herself to the only remaining man."

Bussy frowned.

" At all events," continued Saint-Luc, " here comes my

wife. She always gives good advice. After having gathered flowers in the queen-mother's garden, she will be in a very good humor. Listen to her."

Jeanne appeared, radiant with happiness and sparkling with mischief. There are some happy natures which make all around them seem full of promise for the future.

Bussy met her as a friend. She held out her hand to him, a fact which proves that the plenipotentiary Dubois did not import the fashion from England with the treaty for the quadruple alliance.

"How are your love affairs?" she inquired, as she tied her flowers with a gold chain.

"Dying," replied Bussy.

"No, they are wounded and faint," said Saint-Luc, "but I am sure you can call them back to life, Jeanne."

"Come, show me the wound," she said.

"Here it is in brief," replied Saint-Luc: "M. de Bussy does not like smiling on the Comte de Monsoreau and has made up his mind to withdraw."

"And leave Diane?" cried Jeanne in terror.

"Oh! madame, Saint-Luc has not told you that I wish to die."

Jeanne looked at him for a moment with a glance which was anything but evangelical.

"Poor Diane," she murmured, "what is the use of loving men? They are all ungrateful."

"Listen to my wife's principles."

"I am ungrateful!" cried Bussy, "because I do not wish to debase my love by practising a disgraceful hypocrisy."

"Ah, monsieur, that is but a poor excuse," said Jeanne. "If you really loved, you would fear but one thing,—to be loved no more."

"Ah, ah!" said Saint-Luc.

"But, madame," said Bussy, "there are some sacrifices—"

"Not another word. Confess that you no longer love Diane; that would be more worthy of a man of honor."

Bussy turned pale at the mere thought.

" You dare not say it, but I shall."

" Madame, madame ! "

" You men are very amusing with your sacrifices. And do you suppose that we make none ? What ! she exposes herself to be massacred by that tyrant Monsoreau ; she lets a man keep his rights by displaying a courage and strength of will of which Samson and Hannibal would have been incapable. Oh ! Diane is sublime, and I would not have done one fourth of what she has."

" Thank you," replied Saint-Luc, with a ceremonious smile which caused Jeanne to burst out laughing.

Bussy hesitated.

" And he reflects ! " cried Jeanne ; " he does not fall on his knees, and say '*meā culpā*.' "

" You are right," replied Bussy. " I am only a man, an imperfect creature, inferior to the least noble of women."

" It is very fortunate that you are at last convinced," said Jeanne.

" What are your orders ? "

" That you go at once to visit—"

" M. de Monsoreau ? "

" Who speaks of him ?—Diane."

" But they are always together."

" When you went so often to visit Madame de Barbezieux, did she not always have near her a big ape who would bite you because he was jealous ? "

Bussy laughed. Saint-Luc and Jeanne did the same ; their mirth brought to the windows all the courtiers who were walking in the galleries.

" Madame," at length said Bussy, " I am going to see M. de Monsoreau. Adieu ! "

Thereupon they separated. Bussy begged Saint-Luc to say nothing of his intended duel with the favorites.

He went at once to see M. de Monsoreau whom he found in bed. The count uttered cries of joy when he perceived him. Rémy had just promised that his wound would be healed within three weeks.

Diane placed her finger on her lips ; it was her mode

of greeting. Bussy had to tell the count the whole story of the mission which the Duc d'Anjou had intrusted to him, his visit to court, the king's uneasiness, and the cold demeanor of the favorites.

Cold demeanor was the word he used. Diane merely laughed. Monsoreau became thoughtful, asked Bussy to come nearer, and whispered to him,—

“Are there not other projects on foot?”

“I think so,” replied Bussy.

“Believe me,” said Monsoreau, “do not compromise yourself for this mean man. I know him; he is perfidious. I can assure you that he never hesitates to betray one.”

“I know it,” said Bussy with a smile, as he recalled the circumstances in which he had been betrayed by the duke.

“You see,” said Monsoreau, “you are my friend, and I wish to put you on your guard. Moreover, every time that you will find yourself in a difficult position, ask my advice.”

“Monsieur, you must sleep after the dressing of your wound,” said Rémy.

“Yes, dear doctor. My friend, take a turn in the garden with Madame de Monsoreau. I am told it is charming this year.”

“As you please,” replied Bussy.

CHAPTER LXXIX.

M. DE MONSOREAU'S PRECAUTIONS.

SAINT-LUC was right; Jeanne was right. At the end of a week, Bussy had found it out, and did them full justice.

To be like the ancient Romans would have been great and beautiful in the eyes of posterity; but Bussy, forgetful of Plutarch who had ceased to be his favorite author since love had corrupted his heart,—Bussy, handsome as

Alcibiades, and thinking only of the present, cared little for an article in history, which would place him on a level with Scipio and Bayard.

Diane was more simple and natural. She gave herself up to the two instincts which the cynical Figaro recognizes as inborn in the race,—to love and to deceive. She never thought of carrying her ideas of honesty to speculative philosophy.

To love Bussy was her logic; to be his alone was her moral; to thrill with pleasure at the mere touch of his hand was her metaphysic.

M. de Monsoreau, whose accident was now a fortnight old, was getting better and better. He had avoided fever, thanks to cold water applications,—that remedy which chance, or rather Providence had enabled Ambroise Paré to discover,—when suddenly he received a great shock. He heard that M. le Duc d'Anjou had just arrived in Paris with the queen-mother and his Angevins.

The count had every reason to be uneasy, for on the day following his arrival, the prince, under pretext of inquiring about his health, presented himself at the *hôtel* of the Rue des Petits-Pères. There was no possibility of denying himself to a Royal Highness who took such a tender interest in him. M. de Monsoreau received the prince, who was charming to the master of the hounds, and more especially so to his wife.

No sooner had the prince left than M. de Monsoreau called Diane, and leaning on her arm, walked three times around the room, in spite of Rémy's expostulations.

After that, he seated himself in that same armchair; he seemed very pleased, and Diane saw by his smile that he must be meditating some scheme. But this belongs to the private history of the house of Monsoreau.

Let us, therefore, return to M. le Duc d'Anjou's arrival which belongs to the narrative of this book.

The day when Monseigneur François de Valois returned to the Louvre was not without interest to the lookers-on; and this is what they observed: much haughtiness on the part of the king, great indifference on the part of the

queen-mother, an humble insolence on the part of the Duc d'Anjou who seemed to say,—

“ Why the devil did you recall me if you meant to receive me in this way ? ”

This whole reception was accompanied by angry looks on the part of MM. de Livarot, De Ribeirac, and D'Entrauges who, warned by Bussy, were very glad to make their future antagonists understand that they would offer no opposition to the proposed duels.

Chicot, that day, made more marches and counter-marches than Cæsar on the eve of the battle of Pharsalia. Then all became peaceful once more.

Two days after his arrival, the Duc d'Anjou paid a second visit to his wounded friend. Monsoreau, informed of the slightest detail of the interview between the king and his brother, humored the Duc d'Anjou, and encouraged his hostile intentions.

As he was getting better and better, after the duke's departure, he took the arm of his wife and walked once around the room. After that he sat down with an even more satisfied look than the first time.

That same evening, Diane told Bussy that M. de Monsoreau was surely meditating something. A moment later, Monsoreau and Bussy were left alone.

“ When I think,” said Monsoreau to Bussy, “ that this prince who smiles on me so pleasantly is my mortal enemy and had me assassinated by M. de Saint-Luc—”

“ Oh, assassinated,” said Bussy ; “ take care, Monsieur le Comte, Saint-Luc is a gentleman, and you confessed yourself that you provoked him and were the first to draw the sword, and that he wounded you in a duel.”

“ Very well ; but it is none the less true that he only acted in obedience to the Duc d'Anjou's instigations.”

“ Listen,” said Bussy, “ I know the duke, but I also know M. de Saint-Luc ; I must tell you that M. de Saint-Luc is devoted to the king, and not at all to the duke. Ah, if you had been wounded by Antraguet, Livarot, or Ribeirac, I do not say—but Saint-Luc—”

" You do not know French history as I do, my dear M. de Bussy," said Monsoreau, clinging to his opinion.

Bussy might have told him that if he did not know French history, he was particularly well acquainted with that of Anjou, particularly that portion where the Château de Méridor is situated.

Monsoreau was at last able to get up and walk in the garden.

" That is sufficient," he said. " To-night we shall move."

" Why so ? " asked Rémy, " are you not comfortable on the Rue des Petits-Pères, or do you find lack of amusement ? "

" On the contrary," said Monsoreau, " I have too much. M. d'Anjou fatigues me with his visits. He is always accompanied by thirty gentlemen, and the noise of their spurs grates on my nerves."

" But where are you going ? "

" I have ordered my little house at the Tournelles to be prepared for me."

Bussy and Diane—for Bussy was always there—exchanged a fond glance of memories.

" What ! that hovel ? " cried Rémy, heedlessly.

" Ah, ah, you know it ? " said Monsoreau.

" *Pardieu !* " said the young man, " who does not know the houses of the master of the hounds, particularly when one has lived Rue Beaufreillis."

Monsoreau, from force of habit, had some vague suspicion in his mind.

" Yes, I shall go there," he said, " and I shall be comfortable. We cannot receive more than four persons at a time. It is a fortress, and from the window one can see visitors at a distance of three hundred paces."

" So that—" asked Rémy.

" So that it is possible to avoid them," said Monsoreau, " particularly when one is in good health."

Bussy bit his lips. He feared that the day might come when Monsoreau would avoid him also ; Diane sighed.

She remembered that in this little house she had seen Bussy lying fainting on her bed. Rémy reflected; so he was the first of the three who spoke.

“ You cannot go,” he said.

“ And why not, if you please ? ”

“ Because the master of the hounds must hold receptions, and keep servants and hounds. He may have a palace for his hounds, but he cannot have a kennel for himself.”

“ Humph ! ” said Monsoreau, in a tone that meant, “ That is true.”

“ And as I am doctor of the mind as of the body, it is not your stay here which worries me.”

“ What is it, then ? ”

“ That of Madame.”

“ Well ? ”

“ Well, send her away.”

“ Separate myself from the countess ! ” cried Monsoreau, fixing on Diane a look in which there was surely more anger than love.

“ Then give up your position as master of the hounds. I think that would be wise, as you must either fulfil or not fulfil your duties. If you do not, you will displease the king ; if you do—”

“ I shall do all I have to do,” said Monsoreau, grinding his teeth ; “ but I will not leave the countess.”

The count had just spoken these words when a great noise of horses and voices was heard in the courtyard. Monsoreau started.

“ Again the duke ! ” he murmured.

“ Exactly,” said Rémy, going to the window. He had not finished speaking when the duke, taking advantage of the privilege of princes to enter unannounced, appeared at the door.

Monsoreau was on the alert ; he saw that François' first glance was for Diane. The duke's overflowing gallantry enlightened him even better. He brought to her as a present one of those rare jewels, a masterpiece, such as the patient and generous artists of that day produced,

three or four, during their lifetime ; yet masterpieces were more frequent in those days than they are now.

This was a charming poniard, with a dagger of chased gold. The handle was a scent bottle. On the blade was a whole chase carved with admirable skill,—dogs, horses, hunters, game, trees, and sky, mingled together in harmonious confusion, and kept the eye fixed on the blade of azure and gold.

“ Let me see,” cried Monsoreau, who feared there might be some note concealed in the handle. The prince at once separated the two parts.

“ To you who are a hunter,” he said, “ I give the blade ; the handle is for the countess. Good morning, Bussy ; I see you have become the count’s intimate friend.”

Diane blushed ; but Bussy remained very self-possessed.

“ Monseigneur,” he said, “ you forget that you sent me yourself to inquire after M. de Monsoreau’s health. I obeyed your Highness’s orders as usual.”

“ That is true,” said the duke, who seated himself near Diane and spoke to her in a low voice. After a few minutes, —

“ Count,” he said, “ I find it horribly warm in this sick-room. I see that the countess feels it, and I shall offer her my arm to take a turn in the garden.”

The husband and the lover exchanged an angry look. Diane, being thus invited, rose and placed her hand on the duke’s arm.

“ Give me your arm,” said Monsoreau to Bussy, and he followed his wife.

“ Ah, ah,” said the duke, “ you seem to be quite well !”

“ Yes, monseigneur, and I hope I shall soon be able to accompany Madame de Monsoreau wherever she goes.”

“ Very good ; but in the meantime you must not over-exert yourself.” Monsoreau himself felt the justness of this remark, so he sat on a bench whence he could not lose sight of them.

"Here, count," he said to Bussy, "if you were very amiable you would escort Madame de Monsoreau to my little *hôtel* near the Bastille. I would really prefer to have her there. Having snatched her from the claws of this vulture at Méridor, I shall not have her devoured in Paris."

"Not at all, monsieur," said Rémy to his master, "you cannot accept."

"Why not?" asked Monsoreau.

"Because you belong to M. d'Anjou, who would never forgive you if you helped to play such a trick on him."

"What do I care?" cried the impetuous young man, when a glance from Rémy told him that he should be silent. Monsoreau was reflecting.

"Rémy is right," he said; "I cannot ask you to do this for me. I shall conduct her myself, for within two or three days I shall be in condition to dwell there myself."

"Folly!" said Bussy; "you will lose your office."

"Possibly, but I shall keep my wife." And he accompanied these words with a frown which made Bussy sigh. That very night the count conducted his wife to the little house of the Tournelles which our readers know so well.

Rémy aided the convalescent in making himself comfortable. Then, as he was a most devoted man, he understood that in this small house Bussy would be in need of every assistance, so he made peace with Gertrude, who began by beating him and ended by forgiving him. Diane resumed possession of her old room with the white and gold damask hangings.

Only a narrow passage separated this room from that of the count. Bussy pulled out his hair by the handfuls. Saint-Luc pretended that rope ladders had reached such a point of perfection that they could replace stairs. Monsoreau rubbed his hands and smiled when he thought of the Duc d'Anjou's annoyance.

CHAPTER LXXX.

A VISIT TO THE LITTLE HOUSE.

WITH some men excitement takes the place of real passion, as hunger gives the wolf and hyena the appearance of courage. M. d'Anjou, whose annoyance cannot be described when he found that Diane had left Méridor, had returned to Paris filled with this sentiment. He was almost in love with this woman just because she was taken from him.

The result was that his hatred of Monsoreau, which had begun on the day when he first discovered that Monsoreau had betrayed him, changed into a sort of fury, all the more dangerous that, having learned to know the count's energetic character, he wished to be able to strike without receiving any blow in return.

On the other hand, he had not renounced his political aspirations, while he had grown in his own estimation. He had scarcely reached Paris when he resumed his underhand machinations.

The moment was favorable. A large number of wavering conspirators, encouraged by the sort of triumph which the king's weakness and Catherine's cunning had afforded to the Angevins, gathered around the Duc d'Anjou, uniting by strong, but invisible, threads the prince's cause with that of the Guises, who remained prudently in the shadow, greatly alarming Chicot by their silence.

However, the duke no longer confided his political projects to Bussy ; he manifested towards him a friendly hypocrisy and nothing more. The prince was vaguely uneasy at having seen him in Monsoreau's house, and begrudged him the confidence which Monsoreau, usually so distrustful, seemed to have in him.

He was also frightened at the joy and happiness which shone on Diane's face, and made her even more charming than before. The prince knew that flowers get color and

perfume only in the sunlight, and women in the light of love. Diane was visibly happy, and for this evil-minded and ever suspicious prince the happiness of others seemed a kind of hostility.

Born a prince he had attained power by dark and crooked means ; he had made up his mind to resort to force for his love or vengeance, since force had succeeded so well. Advised by D'Aurilly, he thought it would be shameful to be balked in his purpose by such ridiculous obstacles as the jealousy of a husband or the repugnance of a woman.

One day, after spending a bad night haunted by evil dreams, he felt that he was in the proper mood, and ordered his equipages to visit Monsoreau.

Monsoreau, as we know, had left for his little house. The prince smiled as he heard this. He inquired about the situation of the house, and hearing it was on the Place Saint-Antoine, he turned to Bussy who accompanied him, and said,—

“ Since he is on the Place Saint-Antoine, let us go thither.”

The escort set out in that direction, and the neighborhood was soon excited over the presence of twenty-four gentlemen who composed the duke's usual retinue, and who had each two lackeys and three horses. The prince knew the house and door, and Bussy knew them no less well.

Both stopped before the door, entered the alley, and mounted the stairs ; only the prince entered the apartments, while Bussy remained on the landing. The result of this arrangement was, that the prince who seemed to be the privileged character saw only Monsoreau, lying on a couch, while Bussy was received in the arms of Diane who pressed him to her heart, while Gertrude kept watch.

Monsoreau, naturally pale, became livid when he perceived the prince,—his dreaded vision.

“ Monseigneur,” he cried, “ you here in this humble house ! This is too much honor for me.”

The irony was visible. The count scarcely took the

trouble to disguise it, yet the prince pretended not to observe it, and approached with a smile.

“ Wherever a sick friend goes,” he said, “ I go to inquire about his heath.”

“ I believe your Highness spoke the word ‘ friend.’ ”

“ I did, my dear count ; how are you ? ”

“ Much better, monseigneur. I can get up and walk about. Within a week, I shall be quite well.”

“ Was it your physician who prescribed the air of the Bastille for you ? ” asked the prince, with an innocent air.

“ Yes, monseigneur.”

“ Were you not comfortable on the Rue des Petits-Pères ? ”

“ No, monseigneur, I received too much company ; they made too much noise.”

The count uttered these words in a firm tone which did not escape the prince, yet he affected not to notice it.

“ But you seem to have no garden here,” he said.

“ The garden did me no good, monseigneur.”

“ But where did you walk ? ”

“ That is just it, monseigneur, I did not walk.”

The prince bit his lip and leaned back in his chair.

“ Do you know, count,” he said after a pause, “ that many people are applying to the king for your position ? ”

“ Indeed, and on what pretext, monseigneur ? ”

“ A great many pretend that you are dead.”

“ Oh ! monseigneur, I am sure you reply that I am not ? ”

“ I reply nothing at all ; you bury yourself, therefore you are dead.”

Monsoreau now bit his lips.

“ Well then, monseigneur, I must lose my position.”

“ Really ? ”

“ Yes, there are other things which I prefer to it.”

“ Ah,” said the prince, “ you are very disinterested.”

“ Such is my nature, monseigneur.”

“ In that case you should not object to allow the king to become acquainted with your nature.”

“ Who would tell him of it ? ”

“ Why, if he question me, I shall be compelled to repeat our conversation.”

“ Faith, monseigneur, if all that is said in Paris were repeated to the king, two ears would not suffice to listen.”

“ What is said in Paris, monsieur ? ” said the prince, turning as though he had been stung.

Monsoreau saw that the conversation had gradually drifted to subjects far too serious to be discussed by a convalescing man not yet at liberty to act ; he calmed the anger of his soul, and assuming an indifferent look,—

“ What should I, a poor invalid, know ? ” he said ; “ I only see the shadow of passing events. If the king is displeased at the manner in which I discharge my duties, he is wrong.”

“ How so ? ”

“ Why, my accident proceeds a little from him.”

“ Explain yourself.”

“ Well, M. de Saint-Luc who struck the blow, is he not among the king’s dearest friends ? The king himself taught him the thrust by which he wounded me, and nothing tells me that the king did not prompt him.”

The Duc d’Anjou almost made a sign of approbation.

“ You are right,” he said, “ but the king is the king.”

“ Until he ceases to be,” said Monsoreau.

The duke started.

“ By the way,” he said, “ is not Madame de Monsoreau here ? ”

“ Monseigneur, she is now ill, or she would have come to present her respects to your Highness.”

“ Ill ? Poor woman ! ”

“ Yes, monseigneur.”

“ From grief at seeing you suffer ? ”

“ Together with the fatigue attending on this change of abode.”

“ I trust her illness will be short, my dear count. You have a clever physician,” and he rose.

“ The fact is,” said Monsoreau, “ that dear Rémy took admirable care of me.”

" But you are naming Bussy's physician."

" The count has in fact given him to me."

" Are you then so intimate with Bussy ? "

" He is my best, I may almost say, my only friend," coldly replied Monsoreau.

" Adieu, count," said the prince, raising the damask curtain. Just as he stepped out, he fancied he saw a woman's dress disappear into the next room, while Bussy suddenly appeared at his post in the hall. The duke's suspicions increased.

" We are going," he said to Bussy, who did not reply, but went down at once to prepare the escort, and perhaps also, to hide his blushing face. The duke, left alone, tried to penetrate in the direction where he had seen the dress disappear; but on turning round, he observed that Monsoreau had followed him, and was standing pale and trembling on the threshold.

" Your Highness mistakes the way," he said, coldly.

" True," stammered the duke. " Thank you," and he went down with rage in his heart. On the way home, which was long, he and Bussy did not exchange a single word. Bussy left the duke at the door of his *hôtel*. When François had entered, and was alone in his cabinet, D'Aurilly mysteriously glided in.

" Well," said the duke, " I am flouted by the husband."

" And perhaps also by the lover, monseigneur," said the musician.

" What are you saying ? "

" The truth."

" Then finish."

" Listen, monseigneur; I hope your Highness will pardon me; it was in your service."

" That is settled; you are pardoned in advance."

" Well, I watched from under a shed in the yard, while you were upstairs."

" Ah, ah, and what did you see ? "

" I saw a woman's dress. I saw that woman lean forward, and I saw two arms thrown around her neck, after

which I heard distinctly the sound of a long and tender kiss."

" But who was the man ? " asked the duke. " Did you recognize him ? "

" I cannot recognize arms," said D'Aurilly ; " gloves have no faces, monseigneur."

" Yes ; but you might recognize the gloves."

" In fact, it seemed to me—"

" That you recognized them ? Eh ? "

" But this is a mere supposition."

" No matter, speak."

" Well, monseigneur, they looked like M. de Bussy's."

" Buff, embroidered in gold ? " asked the duke, from whose eyes was torn the veil which concealed the truth.

" Yes, monseigneur, buff, embroidered in gold," said D'Aurilly.

" Ah, Bussy ! yes, Bussy ! it is Bussy ! " cried the duke. " Blind that I was, or rather, no, I was not blind, only I could not believe in so much audacity."

" Take care," said D'Aurilly. " Your Highness is speaking very loud."

" Bussy ! " again repeated the duke, recalling to mind a thousand circumstances unnoticed before, but which now became so significant.

" Yet, monseigneur," said D'Aurilly, " you must not believe too lightly. Might there not have been some man concealed in Madame de Monsoreau's chamber ? "

" Yes, no doubt ; but Bussy, who was in the corridor, must have seen him, too."

" Very true, monseigneur."

" And then the gloves ! the gloves ! "

" Quite true ; and then, besides the sound of the kiss I heard something else—"

" What ? "

" Three words."

" Which ones ? "

" 'Till to-morrow evening.' "

" Ah, mon Dieu ! "

" Now, if you were willing to go through the

same exercises as on former occasions, we might make use."

" D'Aurilly, we shall begin to-morrow evening."

" Your Highness knows that I am at his orders."

" Ah, Bussy ! " repeated the duke, between his teeth ; Bussy, traitor to his lord ! Bussy, that bugbear to all ! Bussy, that man of honor who does not wish me to be King of France ! "

And the duke, smiling with infernal joy, dismissed D'Aurilly to reflect more at ease.

CHAPTER LXXXI.

THE WATCHERS.

D'AURILLY and the Duc d'Anjou kept word with each other. The duke kept Bussy near him all day, so as not to lose sight of his movements. Bussy asked nothing better than to attend the prince during the day ; in this manner he had his evenings free.

This was his method, and he put it into practice. At ten o'clock he wrapped himself in his cloak, and with his open ladder started towards the Bastille. The duke, who did not know that Bussy had his ladder with him, and who could not believe that he would go thus alone through the streets of Paris, supposed he would stop at his *hôtel* for a horse and an attendant : so he lost ten minutes in preparations. During these ten minutes Bussy, who was active and in love, had gone three-fourths of the way.

He was fortunate, as all bold men usually are ; he met no one on the way, and when he approached he saw a light at the window. That was the signal agreed upon with Diane.

He threw his ladder on to the balcony. That ladder, furnished with six hooks, was sure to fasten on something. At the noise, Diane extinguished the light, and opened her window to secure the ladder. This was done in a moment.

Diane glanced at the square and peered into all the nooks and corners. The street seemed deserted.

She then made a sign to Bussy to mount ; he climbed up two steps at a time. There were ten, so it took him five seconds.

The moment was happily chosen ; for while he entered through the window, M. de Monsoreau, who had been patiently listening for more than ten minutes at his wife's door, painfully descended the stairs, leaning on the arm of a confidential valet who replaced Rémy in all cases where medical skill was not needed. This double manœuvre was so cleverly executed that M. de Monsoreau opened the street door just as Bussy drew up his ladder and Diane closed her window.

Monsoreau found himself in the street, but, as we have said, the street was deserted and he saw nothing.

" You have been ill-informed," he said to the servant.

" No, monseigneur," replied the latter, " I have just come from the Hôtel d'Anjou, where one of the grooms, who is my friend, told me that Monseigneur had positively ordered two horses for this evening. Now, monsieur, it may have been to go somewhere else."

" Where else can he go ? " asked Monsoreau, in a gloomy voice. The count was like all jealous men, who believe that the rest of humanity has no other thought than to torment him. He looked around a second time.

" I would perhaps have done better to remain in Diane's room," he muttered. " But they may have signals to correspond ; she would have warned him of my presence, and I would have seen nothing. It is better to watch outside as we first decided. Come, take me to the hiding-place which you tell me is so good."

" Come, monsieur," said the valet. Monsoreau advanced, leaning on the man's arm.

In fact, within twenty-five feet of the door was an enormous pile of stones used by the children as fortifications in their mock combats, the popular remains of the feuds of the Burgundians and Armagnacs.

The valet had arranged these stones in a way to shelter

two persons. He spread a cloak on them, and the count crouched upon it. The servant placed himself at his feet. A loaded musket was laid beside him. The man was about to light the match, but Monsoreau prevented him.

"There will always be time for that. We are scenting royal game, and the penalty is a heavy one for whoever lays hands on him."

His eyes, shining like those of the wolf hidden near the sheepfold, wandered from Diane's window to the adjacent streets and back again, for he wished to see, yet feared to be seen.

Diane had prudently drawn her heavy damask curtains, so that scarcely a ray of light filtered around the edges and betrayed the life in that otherwise silent house. Monsoreau had not been watching ten minutes, when two horsemen came down the Rue Saint-Antoine. The servant did not speak, but pointed silently in their direction.

"Yes," said Monsoreau, "I see."

The two men dismounted at the corner of the Hôtel des Tournelles, and tied their horses to the iron rings placed in the wall for that purpose.

"Monseigneur," said D'Aurilly, "I think we are too late; he must have come directly from your *hôtel*. He had an advance of ten minutes, and must already have entered."

"Very well," said the prince, "but if we did not see him go in, we shall see him come out."

"Yes, but when?" said D'Aurilly.

"When we wish," said the prince.

"May I ask how you intend to go about it, monseigneur?"

"Nothing is more simple. We have but to knock at the door, one of us, that is you, under pretext that you come to inquire after M. de Monsoreau's health. All lovers are afraid of noise, so while you enter the house, he will come out through the window, and I shall see him depart."

"And Monsoreau?"

“ What the devil can he say ? He is my friend ; I am uneasy ; I send to inquire because I found him looking badly to-day, nothing more.”

“ This is most ingenious, monseigneur,” said D’Aurilly.

“ Do you hear what they are saying ? ” asked Monsoreau.

“ No, monsieur, but if they continue to talk, we are sure to hear them as they are coming this way.”

“ Monseigneur,” said D’Aurilly, “ here is a pile of stones which seems to have been placed there on purpose to conceal your Highness.”

“ Yes, but wait ; there may be some way of seeing through the curtains.”

As we have said before, Diane had lit the lamp, and a little ray of light shone through the cracks. The Duke and D’Aurilly walked up and down for upwards of ten minutes, in search of a place whence they could look into Diane’s chamber. During these evolutions, Monsoreau was burning with impatience, and his hand often wandered to the barrel of the musket.

“ Oh, shall I suffer this ? ” he murmured ; “ shall I also swallow this affront ? No, no, I cannot ; my patience is worn out ; *mordieu !* to think that I can neither sleep nor wake, nor even suffer in peace, because a shameful caprice has lodged itself in the idle brain of that miserable prince. No, I am not a complaisant valet, I am the Comte de Monsoreau, and if he comes this way, on my honor, I shall blow his brains out. Light the match, René.”

At this moment, the prince finding fruitless his attempts to see, returned to his first idea, and was about to conceal himself among the stones, when all at once, D’Aurilly, forgetting the distance between them, laid his hand on the prince’s arm.

“ Well, monsieur,” said the prince in surprise, “ what is it now ? ”

“ Come, monseigneur, come,” said D’Aurilly.

“ Why so ? ”

“ Do you see something shining on the left ? Come, monseigneur.”

“ Yes, I see a spark among those stones.”

“ That is the match of a musket or an arquebuse.”

“ Ah, ah ! ” cried the duke, “ and who can be there ? ”

“ Some friend or servant of Bussy’s. Let us go away and come back from another direction. The servant will give the alarm, and we shall see Bussy descend from the window.”

“ You are right,” said the duke. “ Come,” and they crossed the street going to the place where they had tied their horses.

“ They are going away,” said the valet.

“ Yes,” said Monsoreau, “ did you recognize them ? ”

“ To me they looked like the prince and D’Aurilly.”

“ Exactly ; but I shall soon be even more certain.”

“ What is Monsieur about to do ? ”

“ Come.”

During that time, the duke and D’Aurilly turned down the Rue Sainte Catherine, with the intention of coming back through the boulevard of the Bastille. Monsoreau entered and prepared his litter. At this noise, Bussy took fright ; the light was again extinguished, the window opened, the ladder fastened, and Bussy to his great regret was obliged to flee like Romeo, but without having, like Romeo, seen the sun rise, and heard the song of the lark. Just as he reached the ground, and Diane threw the ladder after him, the duke and D’Aurilly appeared at the corner of the Bastille.

Right below the fair Diane’s window, they saw a shadow suspended between heaven and earth, but the shadow disappeared immediately round the corner of the Rue Saint Paul.

“ Monsieur,” said the valet to Monsoreau, “ we shall wake up the whole household.”

“ What does it matter ? ” replied Monsoreau, furious.

“ I think I am master here, and I have the right to do in my own house what M. le Duc d’Anjou wished to do.”

The litter was ready. Monsoreau sent for two of his attendants who lived on the Rue des Tournelles, and when these people who were in the habit of accompanying him

had taken their places, the machine started off at once, drawn by two vigorous horses, and had reached the Hôtel d'Anjou in less than fifteen minutes. The duke and D'Aurilly had so recently returned that their horses were not even unsaddled.

Monsoreau, who had the privilege of entering the duke's apartment at all times, appeared on the threshold just as the duke, after having thrown his hat on a chair, was holding out his boots for a valet to remove them. Another valet announced the master of the hounds. A clap of thunder would not have startled the prince more than did this announcement.

“M. de Monsoreau!” he cried, and his emotion was perceptible in the pallor which overspread his face and in the tremulousness of his voice.

“Yes, monseigneur, in person,” replied the count, repressing, or rather trying to repress, his emotion. The effort was so violent that he felt his knees bend beneath him as he fell upon a seat near the door.

“You will kill yourself, my dear friend,” said the duke; “you are so pale that you seem about to faint.”

“Oh, no, monseigneur. For the moment I have things of great importance to communicate to your Highness; I may faint afterwards.”

“Speak, my dear count,” said François, greatly agitated.

“But not before your attendants, I suppose,” said Monsoreau.

The duke dismissed every one, even D'Aurilly, and the two men remained alone.

“Has your Highness just come in?” asked Monsoreau.

“As you see, count.”

“Your Highness is very imprudent to wander through the streets in this manner.”

“Who tells you I have been in the streets?”

“Why, judging from the dust on your clothes—”

“M. de Monsoreau,” said the prince in a sharp tone, “have you any other employment besides that of the master of the hounds?”

" That of spy ? Yes, monseigneur. All the world follows it more or less, and I do like the rest."

" And what does this profession bring you, monsieur ? "

" A knowledge of what is going on."

" That is curious," said the prince, drawing nearer the bell in order to be able to summon help.

" Very curious," said Monsoreau.

" Then tell me what you have to say."

" I came for that purpose."

" Will you permit me to sit down ? "

" No irony, monseigneur, towards an old and faithful friend who comes at this hour and in this state to do you a great service ! If I sat down, monseigneur, on my honor, it is because I could not stand."

" A service ? " repeated the duke,— " a service ? "

" Yes."

" Speak, then."

" Monseigneur, I come on the part of a powerful prince."

" From the king ? "

" No, from Monseigneur the Duc de Guise."

" Ah, that is a very different thing. Come near, and speak lower."

CHAPTER LXXXII.

HOW M. LE DUC D'ANJOU SIGNED, AND HOW AFTER HAVING SIGNED HE SPOKE.

THERE was a momentary pause ; then the duke said,—

" Well, Monsieur le Comte, what have you to say to me from MM. de Guise ? "

" A great many things, monseigneur."

" Have they written to you ? "

" Oh, no ; the duke writes no more since the strange disappearance of Maître Nicolas David."

" Then you have been to the army ? "

" No, monseigneur ; they have come to Paris."

" MM. de Guise in Paris ? "

“ Yes, monseigneur.”

“ And I have not seen them ? ”

“ They are too prudent to expose themselves and your Highness at the same time.”

“ And I have not been notified ? ”

“ I am telling you now.”

“ Why have they come ? ”

“ They come, monseigneur, to the rendezvous you have given them.”

“ I have given them a rendezvous ? ”

“ No doubt. The very day on which your Highness was arrested, you had received M. de Guise’s letter, and sent him a verbal reply that he need only be in Paris from the 31st of May to the 2d of June. This is the 31st of May ; if you have forgotten MM. de Guise, they have not forgotten you, monseigneur.”

François turned pale. So many events had occurred since then, that this meeting, important though it was, had entirely escaped his memory.

“ True,” he said, “ but the relations which then existed between me and MM. de Guise no longer exist.”

“ In that case, monseigneur,” said the count, “ you would do well to notify them, because they think differently.”

“ How so ? ”

“ Yes, you may perhaps consider yourself in no way bound to them, but they still consider themselves bound to you.”

“ A trap, my dear count,—a trap in which I shall not be caught a second time.”

“ And where was Monseigneur caught the first time ? ”

“ In the Louvre, *mordieu !* ”

“ Was it the fault of MM. de Guise ? ”

“ I do not say that,” murmured the duke, “ I only say that they did nothing towards my escape.”

“ That would have been difficult, as they were flying themselves.”

“ True,” murmured the duke.

“ But after you had safely reached Anjou, did they no-

send you word, through me, that you could still count on them as they counted on you, and that the day you marched on Paris they would do the same ? ”

“ That is still true,” said the duke, “ but I did not march on Paris.”

“ You did, monseigneur, you are here.”

“ Yes, but as my brother’s ally.”

“ Monseigneur, you will permit me to observe that you are more than their ally.”

“ What am I, then ? ”

“ Their accomplice.”

The Duc d’Anjou bit his lips.

“ And you are sent by them to announce their arrival ? ”

“ I have that honor.”

“ Have they communicated to you the motives of their return ? ”

“ Knowing me to be the trusted follower of your Highness, they have communicated their plans and motives.”

“ They have plans ? What are they ? ”

“ Always the same.”

“ They believe them to be practicable ? ”

“ They look upon them as certain.”

“ And the object of these plans is still— ” The duke stopped, not daring to utter the words which were the natural consequence of what he had just said ; Monsoreau finished for him.

“ To make you King of France ; yes, monseigneur.”

The duke felt his blood rush madly to his face.

“ But is the moment favorable ? ” he asked.

“ Your wisdom must decide.”

“ My wisdom ? ”

“ Yes ; here are the true and visible facts.”

“ Speak.”

“ The appointment of the king as Chief of the League was but a comedy, quickly seen through and appreciated. The reaction has now begun, and the entire country is rising against the tyranny of the king and his creatures. Sermons are calls to arms, and the churches are places where they curse the king instead of praying to God.

The army is trembling with impatience ; the *bourgeois* are organizing themselves ; our emissaries are continually getting new signatures and new adherents to the League ; the reign of the Valois is at last reaching its close. Under the circumstances, MM. de Guise had to select a serious candidate for the throne, and their choice naturally fell upon you. Now, do you renounce your former ideas ? "

The duke did not reply.

" Well," said Monsoreau, " what does your Highness think ? "

" Why," replied the prince, " I think— "

" Monseigneur knows that he may speak openly to me "

" I think," said the duke, " that my brother has no children. After his death, the throne will come to me. And his health is poor ; why should I plot with all these people, compromise my name, my dignity, and my affection in a useless struggle ? Why should I run any risks to obtain a thing which will come to me without any danger ? "

" Your Highness is in error," said Monsoreau. " Your brother's throne will only come to you if you take it. MM. de Guise cannot reign themselves, but they will only allow a king of their own choice to do so. They had counted on your Highness to be this king, but if you refuse, they will get another."

" Who ? " cried the Duc d'Anjou, frowning,— " who else would dare sit on the throne of Charlemagne ? "

" A Bourbon instead of a Valois, one son of Saint Louis instead of another."

" The King of Navarre ! " cried François.

" Why not ? He is young and brave. It is true that he has no children, but we know that he could have some."

" He is a Huguenot."

" Was he not converted at the Saint-Bartholomew ? "

" But he has recanted since then."

" Oh ! he will do to get the throne what he did to save his life."

" Do they think I will give up my rights without defending them ? "

“ The case is provided for.”

“ I shall fight them.”

“ Pooh ! they are soldiers.”

“ I shall put myself at the head of the League.”

“ They are the soul of it.”

“ I shall unite with my brother.”

“ Your brother will be dead.”

“ I shall call on all the kings of Europe to assist me.”

“ The kings of Europe will willingly make war against kings, but they will think twice before making war against a people.”

“ How against a people ? ”

“ No doubt, MM. de Guise have decided to do anything, even to forming a confederation or a republic.”

François clasped his hands in inexpressible anguish. Monsoreau was frightful with his ready answers for everything.

“ A republic ! ” he murmured.

“ *Mon Dieu !* yes ; like Switzerland, Genoa, or Venice.”

“ But my party will not suffer France to be made a republic.”

“ Your party ? ” said Monsoreau. “ Eh ! monseigneur, you have been so disinterested and magnanimous that upon my word your party consists of M. de Bussy and myself.”

The duke could not repress a sinister smile.

“ Then I am tied,” he said.

“ Very nearly, monseigneur.”

“ Then why need you have recourse to me, if I am, as you say, destitute of all power ? ”

“ I mean, monseigneur, that you can do nothing without MM. de Guise, but you can do everything with them.”

“ I can do all with them ? ”

“ Yes ; speak but one word and you shall be king.”

The duke rose in a very agitated state, walked about the room, touching everything around him,—the curtains, tables, chairs,—and finally stopped before Monsoreau.

“ You spoke the truth, count, when you said I had but two friends,—you and Bussy ; ” and he uttered these words with a bland smile which had replaced the look of fury.

“Therefore ?” said Monsoreau, whose eyes glittered.
 “Therefore, faithful friend, speak, I am listening.”
 “Are these your orders, monseigneur ?”
 “Yes.”

“Then here is the plan.”

The duke grew pale, but stopped to listen. The count continued,—

“The Fête Dieu will take place in a week ; for some time past the king has planned for that day a grand procession to the principal convents.”

“It is his habit to have a procession every year at that time.”

“At these times, as your Highness will remember, the king is without his guards, as they remain outside. The king stops before each altar, kneels and recites five *Paters* and five *Aves*, followed by the Seven Psalms.”

“I know all that.”

“He will also go to the Abbey of Sainte-Genevieve.”

“No doubt.”

“Only as an accident will have happened just before the gate—”

“What accident ?”

“A sewer will have given way during the night ; the altar will not be on the porch, but within the courtyard. The king will enter with four or five persons, and the gates will be closed behind him.”

“And then ?”

“Your Highness knows the monks who will do the honors of the Abbey to his Majesty.”

“They will be the same—”

“Who were there at the coronation of your Highness.”

“And they will dare to lay hands on the Lord’s anointed ?”

“Only to cut his hair ; you know the verse,—

“‘ De trois couronnes, la première,
 Tu perdis, ingrat et fuyard ;
 La seconde court grand hasard ;
 Des ciseaux feront la dernière.’”

"They will dare to do that?" cried the duke, with sparkling eyes; "they will touch the king's head?"

"He will no longer be king then."

"How so?"

"Have you not heard of a holy monk who preaches sermons until the time shall come for him to perform miracles?"

"Brother Gorenfot?"

"Exactly."

"The same one who wished to preach to the League with his arquebuse on his shoulder?"

"The same."

"The king will be taken to his cell; once there, the monk will ask him to sign his abdication, and that being done, Madame de Montpensier will enter with her scissors which are bought and which she wears suspended from her belt. They are charming scissors of pure gold and admirably chased."

François remained silent; his eyes shone like those of the cat that watches its prey in the shadow.

"You understand, monseigneur," continued the count.

"We announce to the people that the king, frightened at the weight of his iniquities, has made a vow never to leave the convent where he is repenting. If there are any who doubt the sincerity of this vocation, M. de Guise has the army, M. le Cardinal the Church, and M. de Mayenne the *bourgeoisie*: with this trinity, the people can be made to believe anything."

"But I shall be accused of violence," said the duke, after a pause.

"You are not obliged to be there."

"They will look upon me as an usurper."

"Monseigneur forgets the abdication."

"The king will refuse."

"It seems that Brother Gorenfot is not only very eloquent but very strong."

"The plan is settled?"

"Absolutely."

"And they have no fear of my betraying them?"

"No, monseigneur ; there is another plan, no less perfect, in case you betray them."

"Ah, ah ! " cried François.

"I am not acquainted with that plan, being too well known as your friend ; I am simply aware of its existence."

"Then I yield. What must I do ? "

"Approve."

"Well, I approve."

"But verbal approbation does not suffice."

"How must I approve ? "

"In writing."

"It is folly to suppose that I would consent to that."

"Why so ? "

"Supposing the plot should fail—"

"That is just the case for which your signature is needed."

"They wish to shelter themselves behind my name ? "

"Nothing else."

"Then I refuse a thousand times."

"You cannot."

"I cannot refuse ? "

"No."

"Are you mad ? "

"To refuse is to betray."

"How so ? "

"Because I was not anxious to speak, and only did so at your command."

"Very well, let those gentlemen take it as they wish ; I shall at least have chosen my danger."

"Monseigneur, take care you do not choose wrong."

"I shall risk it," said François, a little agitated, but trying, nevertheless, to retain his composure.

"In your own interest, monseigneur, I do not advise you to do so."

"But I compromise myself by signing."

"In refusing you assassinate yourself."

François shuddered.

"They would dare ? " he asked.

"They would dare anything, monseigneur. The conspirators have gone so far that they must succeed at any price."

The duke fell into a state of indecision easily understood.

"I shall sign," he said.

"When?"

"To-morrow."

"No, monseigneur; if you sign, you must do so at once."

"But MM. de Guise must at least draw up the agreement I am to sign."

"It is already drawn up, monseigneur, and I have it with me."

Monsoreau drew a paper from his pocket. It was a full and entire adhesion to the plan. The duke read it through, and as he read, the count could see him turn pale; when he finished, his knees gave way beneath him, and he sat, or rather fell, on a chair.

"Here, monseigneur," said Monsoreau, giving him a pen.

"Must I then sign?" said François, leaning his head on his hand.

"If you wish to do so; no one forces you."

"I am forced, since I am threatened with assassination."

"God is my witness that I do not threaten; I only warn you."

"Give it here," said the duke, and making an effort, he took, or rather snatched, the pen from his hands and signed.

As he watched his movements, Monsoreau's eye glittered with hope and hatred; when he saw him put the pen to the paper, he was obliged to lean on the table, and his eyes dilated as the duke's hand traced the letters of his name.

"Ah," he said, after François had signed; and seizing the paper, he placed it between his shirt and the garment of woven silk which took the place of the vest in those

days, carefully buttoned his doublet and closed his cloak over the whole. The duke watched him in astonishment, not understanding the expression of this pale face and its flash of ferocious joy.

“ And now, monseigneur, be prudent,” said the count.

“ How so ? ”

“ Yes ; do not go through the streets with D’Aurilly as you did just now.”

“ What do you mean ? ”

“ I mean that this evening you pursued a woman whom her husband adores, and of whom he is so jealous that he will kill whoever approaches her without his permission.”

“ Do you happen to speak of your wife ? ”

“ Yes, monseigneur, since you have made such a good guess, I shall not deny. I married Diane de Méridor, and so long as I live, none shall have her, not even a prince ; and to convince you, monseigneur, I swear by my name and on this dagger,” and he placed the blade so near the prince’s breast that the latter stepped back.

“ You are threatening me, monsieur,” said François, pale with rage and anger.

“ No, prince, as I said just now, I am only warning you.”

“ Of what ? ”

“ That no one will have my wife.”

“ And I warn you that you are too late, as some one already has her,” cried D’Anjou, beside himself.

Monsoreau uttered a terrible cry, and buried his two hands in his hair.

“ It is not you, monseigneur,” he stammered, and his hand which still held the dagger had but to reach out to strike the prince. François stepped back.

“ You are mad,” he said, preparing to ring the bell.

“ No, I see, I talk reason, and I hear well : you said that some one has my wife ; you said it.”

“ I repeat it.”

“ Name the person and prove the fact.”

“ Who was ambushed near your door with a lighted musket ? ”

“ I, myself.”

“ Well, count, during that time, a man was in your house, or rather with your wife.”

“ You saw him enter ? ”

“ I saw him come out.”

“ Through the door ? ”

“ Through the window.”

“ You recognized this man ? ”

“ Yes,” said the duke.

“ Name him,” cried Monsoreau, “ name him, or I do not answer for myself.”

The duke passed his hand over his brow, and a kind of smile flitted over his lips.

“ Monsieur le Comte,” he said, “ on my word as a prince, on my soul, within a week, I shall make known to you the name of this man.”

“ You swear ! ” cried Monsoreau.

“ I swear.”

“ Very well, monseigneur,” said the count, striking his breast over the place where the paper lay, “ you understand, in one week—”

“ Return in one week. I have nothing more to say.”

“ This may be better,” said Monsoreau ; “ in one week I shall have regained all my strength, and he who wishes to avenge himself has need of it all.”

And as he went out he made a gesture which might have been taken for a menace, as well as a farewell.

CHAPTER LXXXIII.

A PROMENADE AT LES TOURNELLES.

In course of time, the Angevin gentlemen returned to Paris, though no one will believe that they did so with much confidence. They knew the king, his brother, and his mother too well to hope that all would terminate in a family embrace. They still remembered their pursuit by the king’s friends, and could not bring themselves to

believe that they were to have a triumph to compensate for this rather unpleasant ceremony. They therefore returned timidly, and slipped into the city armed to the teeth, ready to fire at the least suspicious gesture ; and before reaching the Hôtel d'Anjou, drew their swords fifty times against the *bourgeois* who had committed no other crime than watching them go by. Antraguet showed himself particularly ferocious, and attributed all his disgraces to the king's favorites with whom he was longing to exchange a few significant remarks.

He told Ribeirac of this plan, and was told that to carry it into execution he would need one or two frontiers within easy reach.

"I shall arrange that," said Antraguet.

The duke gave them a cordial welcome. They were his own men, as MM. de Maugiron, Quélus, Schomberg, and D'Epernon belonged to the king. He therefore began by telling them,—

"My friends, there is a plan for killing you. These sorts of receptions are in the air, so look to yourselves."

"We are doing so, monseigneur," said Antraguet, "but should we not present our very humble respects to his Majesty ? If we hide ourselves, we will do little honor to Anjou. What do you think ?"

"You are right," said the duke ; "go if you will, and I shall accompany you."

The three young men exchanged a glance. At this moment, Bussy entered the hall and embraced his friends.

"Ah," he said, "you were late in coming. But what do I hear ?—his Highness proposes to go and have himself killed in the Louvre, like Cæsar in the Roman senate. Remember that each one of the favorites would gladly carry away beneath his cloak a small piece of Monseigneur."

"But, my dear friend, we wish to rub against these gentlemen a little."

Bussy began to laugh.

"We shall see," he said,—"we shall see."

The duke gave him a searching look.

" Let us go to the Louvre," said Bussy, " but alone. Monseigneur can remain in his own garden knocking off poppy heads."

François affected to laugh very gayly. The fact is he was glad to dispense with the disagreeable task. The Angevins donned their richest costumes. They were great lords who gladly spent the whole of their income for silks, velvets, and embroidery. They presented a glittering mass of gold, precious stones, and brocade ; and on their way to the palace, the people cried, "*Noël*," for the popular instinct felt them to be enemies of the favorites.

Henri III. would not receive these gentlemen from Anjou, and they waited vainly in the gallery. This news was brought by MM. de Quélus, Maugiron, Schomberg, and D'Epernon, who all bowed with great politeness and expressed their regrets.

" Ah, messire," said Antraguet, for Bussy held himself aloof ; " the news is sad, but coming from your lips, it loses half of its bitterness."

" Gentlemen," said Schomberg, " you are the very flower of courtesy. Would you be pleased to change this reception into a little promenade ? "

" We were about to ask you to do so," quickly replied Antraguet, whose arm Bussy touched as though to say,—

" Hush, and let them act."

" Where shall we go ? " asked Quélus.

" I know a charming spot near the Bastille."

" Gentlemen, we follow you," said Ribeirac ; " you have but to lead the way."

The four friends of the king left the Louvre, followed by the four Angevins, and walked along the quay to the old inclosure of the Tournelles, which was then the horse market, a kind of open place planted with a few straggling trees, and here and there some posts to which the horses could be tied. The eight gentlemen walked arm-in-arm, and on the way conversed most amicably on various subjects, to the surprise of the *bourgeois* who seeing this unexpected friendship regretted their acclamations, and

said that the Angevins had made some compact with Herod. They reached the place, and Quélus spoke first,—

“ This is a good, lonely place,” he said ; “ see what a good footing there is on this saltpetre.”

“ Yes,” said Antraguet, trying in various places.

“ Well,” continued Quélus, “ these gentlemen and I thought that one of these days you would be willing to accompany us hither to assist M. de Bussy who has invited us all four to meet him.”

“ That is true,” said Bussy to his astonished friends.

“ He said nothing about it,” said Antraguet.

“ Oh ! M. de Bussy is a man who knows the value of things. Will you accept, gentlemen ? ”

“ Certainly, and we rejoice at the honor,” replied the three Angevins in one breath.

“ This is well,” said Schomberg, rubbing his hands. “ Shall we now select our antagonists ? ”

“ I like that arrangement,” said Ribeirac, with flaming eyes, “ therefore—”

“ No, no,” said Bussy, “ that would not be fair. We all have the same feelings, therefore we are inspired by God. Let us leave to Him the care of choosing the opponents. You know that is most important, if we agree that the first who is free can join the others.”

“ That must be, that must be ! ” cried the favorites.

“ All the more reason then to do as the Horatiis : let us draw lots.”

“ Did they draw lots ? ” asked Quélus, reflecting.

“ I have every reason to think so,” replied Bussy.

“ Let us then do likewise.”

“ Wait a moment,” said Bussy. “ Before knowing our antagonists, let us settle the rules of the game. It would be most unjust to have the rules follow the selection.”

“ These are most simple,” said Schomberg ; “ we will fight till death ensues, as M. de Saint-Luc has said.”

“ Of course, but how shall we fight ? ”

“ With the sword and dagger,” said Bussy.

“ On foot ? ” asked Quélus.

"Yes; on horseback one's movements are not so free."

"Then on foot."

"What day?"

"The earliest possible."

"No," said D'Epernon. "I have a thousand things to settle; my will to make: pardon me, but I prefer waiting. Five or six days will whet our appetites."

"That is speaking like a brave man," said Bussy, rather ironically.

"Is this settled?"

"Yes; we always agree on all subjects."

"Then let us draw lots," said Bussy.

"Stop a moment," said Antraguet. "I have a proposition to make. Let us divide the ground. As the names will be coupled two by two, let us have four divisions, one for each pair."

"Very good."

"I propose for number one the long square between the lindens; that is a fine place."

"Agreed."

"But the sun?"

"So much the worse for the second one of the pair; he will face the east."

"Not at all, gentlemen; that would be unjust," said Bussy. "Let us kill, but not assassinate one another. Let us make a semicircle, and have the sun sideways."

Bussy showed the position, which was accepted; after which they drew for the names.

Schomberg came out first, Ribeirac, second. They were the first pair.

Quélus and Antraguet were second.

Livarot and Maugiron, third.

At the name of Quélus, Bussy, who hoped to have him as adversary, knit his brow. D'Epernon, who saw himself with Bussy, turned pale, and was obliged to pull his moustache to bring a little color to his cheeks.

"Now, gentlemen," said Bussy, "until the day of the

combat, we belong to one another. We are friends for life or death. Will you accept a dinner at the Hôtel de Bussy."

All bowed in assent, and went to Bussy's *hôtel*, where a sumptuous repast kept them until morning.

CHAPTER LXXXIV.

WHERE CHICOT GOES TO SLEEP.

ALL these movements of the Angevins had been observed by the king and by Chicot. Henri was walking up and down, impatiently awaiting the return of his friends. Chicot had followed them from a distance and examined their actions, which he could understand better than any one. Having satisfied himself as to the intentions of Bussy and Quélus, he went on to visit Monsoreau.

The master of the hounds was a wily man, but he could not pretend to deceive Chicot. The Gascon brought him the king's greetings ; how could he help receiving him well ! Chicot found Monsoreau in bed.

The visit of the night before had completely unnerved him. Rémy, resting his chin on his hand, watched uneasily for the first symptoms of fever which threatened to seize its victim. Monsoreau was nevertheless able to sustain the conversation and conceal his anger against the Duc d'Anjou in such a manner that none but Chicot could have suspected it. But the more discreet and reserved he was, the better the Gascon read his thoughts.

" The fact is," he said to himself, " no man can be so fond of M. d'Anjou unless he has some plan in his head."

Chicot wished to know whether the count's fever was not a comedy like the one which Nicolas David had played some weeks before. But Rémy was not mistaken.

" This man is ill and unable to do anything," thought Chicot. " There remains M. de Bussy. Let us see what he can do."

And he ran to the Hôtel de Bussy, which he found

glittering with lights, and giving forth vapors which would have caused Gorenflot to utter exclamations of joy.

“ Is M. de Bussy getting married ? ” he asked a lackey.

“ No, monsieur,” replied the latter. “ M. de Bussy has become reconciled with several gentlemen of the court, and is celebrating this reconciliation with a famous banquet.”

“ Unless he poison them, and I know he is incapable of doing that,” said Chicot, “ his Majesty may be at rest on his side.”

He returned to the Louvre, and found Henri walking up and down and grumbling. He had sent three messengers for Quélus, and as these messengers did not understand the king’s uneasiness, they had simply stopped on the way at M. de Birague’s where every man wearing the king’s livery was always sure to find a full glass, some ham, and preserves. The Biragues made use of this method to remain in favor. When Chicot appeared at the door, the king uttered a loud exclamation.

“ Oh, dear friend, do you know what has become of them ? ” he asked.

“ Of whom ? your favorites ? ”

“ Alas, yes, my poor friends.”

“ They must be very low at this moment,” replied Chicot.

“ Have they killed them ? ” asked Henri, with flashing eyes. “ Are they dead ? ”

“ Dead ! I am afraid they are—”

“ Dead, and you laugh, pagan.”

“ Wait, my son, yes, dead, but dead drunk.”

“ Ah, fool, how you frightened me ! But why do you slander those gentlemen ? ”

“ I glorify them, on the contrary.”

“ You are always jesting,—come, be serious. Do you know they went out with the Angevins ? ”

“ Pardieu ! of course I know it.”

“ Well, what has been the result ? ”

“ Well, the result was what I have told you ; they are dead drunk, or very nearly ? ”

“ But Bussy, Bussy ? ”

“ Bussy is making them drink ; he is a very dangerous man.”

“ Chicot, have pity.”

“ Well, yes ; Bussy has given a dinner to your friends ; do you approve of that ? ”

“ Bussy has given them a dinner ? Oh, impossible ; they are sworn enemies.”

“ Exactly ; if they were friends they would not find it necessary to get drunk together. Listen, have you good legs ? ”

“ What do you mean ? ”

“ Would you go as far as the river ? ”

“ To witness such a sight, I would go to the end of the world.”

“ Well, only go to the Hôtel de Bussy, and you will witness that prodigy.”

“ Will you come with me ? ”

“ Thanks, I have just been there.”

“ But Chicot—”

“ Oh, no ; you should understand that I have seen, so there is no necessity of my being convinced. I have walked so much that my legs are three inches shorter. If I walked any more, they would stop at the knees. Go, my son, go.”

The king shot him an angry glance.

“ You are very good to worry about those people,” continued Chicot. “ They are laughing, feasting, and making opposition to the government. Reply to all these things as a philosopher ; they are laughing, let us laugh ; they are dining, let us have something nice and warm ; they are making opposition, let us go to bed after supper.”

The king could not help smiling.

“ You can flatter yourself that you are a true sage,” said Chicot. “ Other kings of France have had long hair, one was brave, one was great, some were lazy. I am sure you will be called Henri the patient. Ah, my son, that is a great virtue, when one has no other.”

"Betrayed," said the king,—"betrayed; those people have not even the manners of gentlemen."

"Ah, you are worried about your friends," cried Chicot, pushing the king into the dining-room, where supper had just been served. "You pity them as if they were dead, and when you are told that they are not dead, you weep—Henri, you are always whining."

"You wear out my patience, Monsieur Chicot."

"Come, would you prefer that they should have five or six inches of steel through their body? Be consistent."

"I would like to be able to count on my friends," said Henri, in a gloomy voice.

"Oh, *ventre de biche!*!" said Chicot, "count on me. I am here, my son, only you must feed me. I want some pheasant and truffles," he added, holding out his plate.

Henri and his only friend went to bed early, the king sighing because his heart was empty, and Chicot breathless because his stomach was full. The next morning MM. de Quélus, Schomberg, Maugiron, and D'Epernon presented themselves at the king's levee, the usher always let them in, so he opened the door for them.

Chicot was still asleep, but the king had been unable to close his eyes. He jumped furiously out of bed, and snatching off the perfumed apparatus from his face and hands,—

"Out of here!" he cried, "out of my sight!"

The astonished usher explained to the young men that the king was dismissing them. They looked at one another with equal surprise.

"But, sire," stammered Quélus, "we wished to tell your Majesty—"

"That you are no longer intoxicated, I suppose," vociferated Henri.

Chicot opened one eye.

"Pardon me, sire," gravely said Quélus, "your Majesty is in error—"

"And yet I have not drunk the wine of Anjou!"

"Ah, very well," said Quélus with a smile, "I understand, yes, well—"

" Well what ? "

" Will your Majesty remain alone with us, that we may have a little conversation ? "

" I hate drunkards and traitors."

" Sire ! " cried the four gentlemen.

" Patience, gentlemen," said Quélus, stopping them. " His Majesty has spent a bad night and had unpleasant dreams ; one word will put him in a better humor."

This impertinent excuse, given by a subject to his king, caused the king to stop and think that any man bold enough to say such things had done nothing dishonorable.

" Speak," said he, " and be brief."

" That is possible but difficult."

" Yes, it is difficult to get around certain accusations."

" No, sire, we go straight to meet them," said Quélus, looking at Chicot and the usher as though to reiterate his request for a private audience. The king made a gesture. The usher went out ; Chicot opened his other eye and said, —

" Pay no attention to me, I am asleep ; " and closing both eyes, he began to snore with all his might.

CHAPTER LXXXV.

WHERE CHICOT WAKES.

WHEN Chicot was seen to be so conscientiously asleep, no one paid any more attention to him. Besides, they were all accustomed to consider him as part of the furniture in the king's chamber.

" Your Majesty," said Quélus with a bow, " knows only one half of the matter, and I make bold to say the least interesting half. We surely do not intend to deny that we dined at M. de Bussy's, and I shall even add in praise of his cook, that we dined very well."

" There was also a certain Austrian, or rather Hungarian wine which I found marvellous," said Schomberg.

"Oh, the horrid German," interrupted the king; "he likes wine; I always suspected that."

"I was always sure of it," said Chicot; "I have seen him drunk twenty times." Schomberg turned towards him. "Pay no attention, my son," said the Gascon, "the king will tell you that I always dream aloud."

Schomberg returned to Henri.

"Faith, sire," he said, "I conceal neither my likes nor my dislikes; good wine is very good."

"Let us not apply the name of good to a thing which makes us forget our lord," said the king, sententiously.

Schomberg was about to reply, being no doubt unwilling to abandon so good a cause, when Quélus made him a sign.

"You are right," said Schomberg, "go on."

"I was saying, sire," resumed Quélus, "that during the repast, and particularly before it, we had most serious and interesting conversations concerning the interests of your Majesty."

"Your introduction is very long," said Henri; "that is a bad sign."

"*Ventre de biche!* how that Valois talks!" cried Chicot.

"Oh, oh! Master Chicot," said the king with much haughtiness, "if you are not asleep you must go."

"*Pardieu!* I do not sleep because I cannot; your tongue wags the whole time."

Quélus, seeing that it was impossible to talk seriously on any subject, in this palace where every one had become so frivolous, shrugged his shoulders and rose angrily.

"Sire," said D'Epernon, "these are grave matters."

"Grave matters?" repeated the king.

"No doubt, if the lives of eight brave men deserve any attention from your Majesty."

"What do you mean?" asked the king.

"I am waiting for the king to be willing to listen to me."

"I am listening, my son, I am listening," said Henri, laying his hand on Quélus' shoulder.

"I was telling you, sire, that we had conversed seriously, and here is the result of our conversations ; royalty is imperilled and weakened."

"That is to say, every one seems to conspire against it," cried Henri.

"It resembles," continued Quélus, "those strange gods who, like those of Tiberius and Caligula, reached old age but could not die, and in their immortality followed the course of mortal infirmities. The gods, having reached that point in their ever increasing decrepitude, can only be saved by the noble sacrifice of some devotee who will give them new life. Being then regenerated by the transfusion of youthful, ardent, and generous blood, they live again, and become once more strong and powerful. Well, sire, your royalty resembles those gods : it can live only by sacrifices."

"His words are golden," said Chicot. "Quélus, my son, go and preach through the streets of Paris, and I will wager an egg against an ox, that you will excel Lincestre, Cahier, Cotton, and even that renowned Gorenfot."

Henri replied nothing. A great change was evidently taking place in his mind. He had first received the favorites with haughty glances, but as he gradually realized the truth, he became thoughtful and gloomy.

"Go on, Quélus," he said, "you see that I am listening."

"Sire," replied the latter, "you are a very great king, but you have no horizon before you. The nobility places so many barriers in your way, that you can see nothing unless it be the greater barriers of the people. Well, sire, you who are a brave man, tell me what is the rule in war when one battalion places itself like a threatening wall before another ? The cowards look behind, and seeing an open space, they flee ; the brave men lower their heads and rush on."

"Well, forward, then !" cried the king. "*Mordieu !* am I not the first gentleman of my kingdom ? Has any one fought greater battles than those of my youth ? Can this century now drawing to a close boast of greater names than those of Jarnac and Moncontour ? Forward,

gentlemen ! and I shall lead you, as I have always done, into the thickest of the fray."

" Yes, sire, forward ! " cried the young men, carried away by the king's warlike demonstration.

Chicot sat up.

" Be quiet," he said, " and let my orator continue. Go on, Quélus ; you have already said great and good things, and doubtless have others to say ; so continue, my friend."

" Yes, Chicot, you too are right, as you often are. I shall continue, and tell the king that the time has now come when royalty must have one of those sacrifices of which I spoke just now. Against these ramparts, which are now closing around your Majesty, four men will march, sure of your approval, and of that of posterity."

" What are you saying, Quélus ? " asked the king, in whose eyes shone joy, tempered by solicitude. " Who are those four men ? "

" Those gentlemen and I," said the young man, with that feeling of lawful pride which exalts every man who risks his life for a principle or a passion,—" those gentlemen and I will devote ourselves, sire."

" For what ? "

" For your safety."

" Against whom ? "

" Against your enemies."

" Private animosities of young men ! " cried Henri.

" Oh, sire, this is the expression of a vulgar prejudice, and your Majesty's tenderness for us is so great that it consents to disguise itself beneath this trivial cloak. Speak like a king, sire, and not like a *bourgeois* of the Rue Saint-Denis. Do not affect to believe that Maugiron hates Antraguet, that Schomberg dislikes Livarot, that D'Epernon is jealous of Bussy, or that Quélus has a grudge against Ribeirac. No, they are all young, handsome, and brave ; friends and enemies, they could all love one another like brothers. But it is no rivalry of man against man that puts the sword in our hands,—it is the quarrel of France against Anjou, the quarrel of popular right against divine right. We present ourselves as the cham-

pions of royalty in the lists where we shall meet the champions of the League, and we came to say, ' Bless us, sire.' Smile on those about to die for you. Your blessing will perhaps make them victorious. Your smile will make them die happy."

Henri, overcome with emotion, opened his arms to Quélus and the others. He clasped them to his heart ; and it was not a spectacle without interest, a picture without expression, but a scene where manly courage was allied to feelings of profound tenderness, sanctified by devotion.

Chicot, sombre and gloomy, with his hand on his brow, looked on from the alcove ; and his face, usually indifferent or sardonic, was not the least eloquent of the six.

" Ah, my brave friends," finally said the king, " this is great devotion. This is a noble task, and I am proud to-day, not of reigning over France, but of being your friend. However, as I know my interests better than any one, I shall not accept a sacrifice, noble though it may be, the result of which may deliver me into the hands of my enemies if it should fail. France is sufficient to fight against Anjou. I know my brother, the Guises, and the League. Oftentimes during my life have I tamed horses more fiery and more obstinate."

" But, sire," cried Maugiron, " soldiers do not reason thus. They cannot admit ill-luck among the considerations of so serious a question,—questions of honor, questions of conscience, in which man follows his convictions rather than his reason."

" Pardon me, Maugiron," said the king, " a soldier may act blindly, but a captain reflects."

" Reflect, sire, and let us act, who are only soldiers," said Schomberg. " Besides, I do not know ill-luck. I always win."

" Friend," interrupted the king, " I cannot say as much ; true, you are only twenty."

" Sire," said Quélus, " your Majesty's kind words only increase our ardor. What day shall we cross swords with MM. de Bussy, Livarot, Antraguet, and Ribeirac ? "

"Never, I absolutely forbid it! Never! do you understand?"

"I beg you to excuse us, sire," replied Quélus; "but the rendezvous was arranged yesterday before the dinner. We have given our word, and cannot take it back."

"Excuse me, monsieur," said Henri. "The king absolves from promises and oaths, by saying, 'I wish, or I do not wish; ' for the king is all-powerful. Send word to those gentlemen that I threatened you with my anger if you came to blows, and that you may not doubt my word, I swear to exile you, if—"

"Stop, sire," said Quélus, "for if you can release us from our promises, God alone can release you from yours. Do not swear, then, because if for such a cause we have deserved your anger,—and this anger takes the form of exiling us,—we shall gladly go into exile; for being no longer on your Majesty's territories, we shall be able to meet our adversaries in foreign lands."

"If those gentlemen approach within musket range of you, I shall have them thrown into the Bastille."

"Sire," said Quélus, "on the day when your Majesty behaves in this manner, we shall go barefooted, with a halter around our necks, and present ourselves to Maître Laurent Testu that he may imprison us with those gentlemen."

"I shall have their heads cut off, *mordieu!* I am the king."

"If such a thing happened to our enemies, sire, we would cut our throats at the foot of their scaffold."

Henri remained silent for a long time, then raising his black eyes,—

"Well," said he, "these are good and brave nobles. If God did not bless a cause defended by such people—"

"Do not be impious, do not blaspheme," said Chicot solemnly, rising from his bed and advancing towards the king. "Yes, these are noble hearts; do what they wish, and name a day for these young men. That is your business, and not to dictate his duty to the Almighty."

"Oh! *mon Dieu! mon Dieu!*" murmured Henri.

"Sire, we beseech you," said the four young men, bowing their heads and bending their knees.

"Well, so be it! If God is just he will give us the victory, but we shall also know how to prepare for it by Christian and judicious measures. Remember, dear friends, that Jarnac performed his devotions before meeting La Chateigneraie: the latter was a great swordsman, but he forgot himself in feasts and banquets and went to see the women, which was an abominable sin. In short he tempted God, who would perhaps have looked favorably on his youth, beauty, and strength, and wished to save his life. Yet Jarnac cut his leg. Listen, we will enter upon a devotion; if I had time I would send your swords to Rome and have them blessed by Our Holy Father. But we have the shrine of Sainte-Genevieve which is worth the very best of relics. Let us fast, macerate ourselves, and sanctify the day of the Fête Dieu; then on the following day—"

"Ah! thanks, sire; it is in a week," cried the four young men. They rushed on the king's hands, and he embraced them all once more, then entered his oratory bathed in tears.

"Our challenge is all drawn up," said Quélus; "there only remains for us to write the name and hour. Write on that table, Maugiron, with the king's pen; write the day after the Fête Dieu."

"It is done," replied Maugiron. "Where is the herald who will carry this letter?"

"I shall carry it, if you please," said Chicot, approaching, "but I wish to give you a piece of advice. His Majesty speaks of fasts, macerations, and shrines. These are all very good after a victory; but before the fight I prefer the effects of good food, generous wines, and eight hours' sleep. Nothing gives strength and agility like a three hours' sitting at table without intoxication. But I approve of the king's views on the subject of love; that is too enervating, and you had best dispense."

"Bravo, Chicot!" cried the young men.

"Adieu, my little lions," replied the Gascon. "I am

going to the Hôtel de Bussy." He walked three steps, then came back. "By the way," he said, "do not leave the king on that beautiful day of the Fête Dieu. Do not go to the country, any of you, but remain at the Louvre like a handful of paladins. Now that you have agreed to that, I will do your commission," and holding the letter in his hand, he made use of his long legs, and was soon out of sight.

CHAPTER LXXXVI.

THE FÊTE DIEU.

DURING this week the coming events were being prepared as the storm gathers in the heavens during the calm and sultry summer days. Monsoreau, who had now recovered from his two days of fever, busied himself watching the thief of his honor ; but as he discovered no one, he remained more than ever convinced of the Duc d'Anjou's hypocrisy and of his evil intentions with regard to Diane.

Bussy did not discontinue to visit the house of the master of the hounds by day ; but having been warned by Rémy of the husband's watchfulness, he came no more at night through the window.

Chicot divided his time into two parts : one was given up to his beloved master Henri de Valois, whom he left as little as possible, and watched as a mother does her child ; the other was for his tender friend Gorenfot, whom he had persuaded to return to his cell, whither he had conducted him, and where he had received from the abbot messire Joseph Foulon, the most charming welcome.

During this visit the king's piety was praised, and the prior seemed most grateful to his Majesty for the honor that would be conferred upon him by his proposed visit to the abbey.

This honor was even greater than had been expected. Henri, urged by the venerable abbot, had consented to spend the day and night in retreat in the convent. Chicot confirmed the abbot in this expectation, and as he was

known to have the king's ear, he was warmly invited to return, and promised to do so. As for Gorenflot, he had grown ten cubits in the estimation of the monks. It was a masterly stroke to have won Chicot's confidence. Machiavelli could not have done better.

Being invited to return, Chicot returned ; and as he carried in his pockets under his cloak, in his wide boots, flagons of the rarest and choicest wines, Brother Gorenflot received him even better than Messire Joseph Foulon. He would then remain for hours in the monk's cell, sharing his studies and ecstasies, according to the general report. The night but one, preceding the Fête Dieu, he spent in the convent ; the next day the report was circulated that Gorenflot had persuaded him to embrace monastic life.

As for the king, he was constantly giving fencing lessons to his friends, teaching them new thrusts, and above all, exercising D'Épernon, to whom fate had given such a formidable adversary, and who, as the time drew near, became visibly uneasy.

Any one wandering in the neighborhood of the Abbey of Sainte-Genevieve, at certain hours of the night, would have met those strange monks of whom we have given a description in the first chapters of our book, and who resembled soldiers more than monks. We might also add, that the Hôtel de Guise had become at once mysterious and turbulent, peopled within, and deserted without ; that meetings were held every evening in the great hall, when all the blinds were hermetically closed, and that these meetings were preceded by dinners to which none but men were invited, and which were presided over by Madame de Montpensier.

All these details are to be found in the memoirs of that period, and we are forced to give them to our readers because they are not found in the archives of the police. In fact, the police of the times did not even suspect what was going on, though the plot was one of importance and the worthy *bourgeois* who went the rounds with helmet and spear, were quite as unsuspecting, not being able to

imagine any dangers save those resulting from fire, burglars, mad dogs, or drunken brawls.

From time to time a patrol would stop before the Hôtel de la Belle-Étoile, Rue de l'Arbre-Sec ; but Maître La Hurière was known to be such a zealous Catholic that all were certain that the noise which took place in his hostelry was all for the greater good of religion.

This was the condition of Paris when dawned the solemnity of the Fête Dieu, which has, since then, been abolished by the constitutional government.

The day was beautiful, and the flowers which filled the streets sent their perfumes through the air.

On that morning, Chicot, who, for the past fortnight had slept regularly in the king's chamber, awakened the king very early ; no one had yet entered the royal chamber.

“ Ah, my poor Chicot,” cried Henri, “ a plague on you ! I have never seen a man choose his time so ill. You have awakened me from the sweetest dream of my life.”

“ What were you dreaming, my son ? ”

“ I dreamed that Quélus had run Antraguet through and through with his sword, and that this dear friend was swimming in his adversary's blood. But here is the day ; let us pray to God for the realization of my dream. Call, Chicot.”

“ What do you want ? ”

“ My haircloth and scourge.”

“ Would you not prefer a good breakfast ? ” asked Chicot.

“ Pagan ! ” said Henri. “ Who would hear mass on the Fête Dieu, with a full stomach ? ”

“ Even so.”

“ Call, Chicot.”

“ Patience,” said Chicot, “ it is barely eight o'clock, and you will have plenty of time to scourge yourself. Let us talk first. Converse with your friend, Valois, and you will not regret it, on the word of Chicot.”

“ Let us talk then, but be brief.”

“ How do we divide our day, my son ? ”

"Into three parts?"

"In honor of the Holy Trinity. Very good. Let us see these parts?"

"First, mass at Saint-Germain-l'Auxerrois."

"Good."

"Return to the Louvre for a collation."

"Very good."

"Then a procession through the streets, stopping at the principal convents of Paris, beginning with the Jacobins and ending with Sainte-Genevieve, where I promised the prior I would remain in retreat until tomorrow, in the cell of a saint who will spend the time in prayers for the success of our cause."

"I know him."

"The saint?"

"Yes, perfectly."

"So much the better; you will accompany me, Chicot: we shall pray together."

"Yes, you may be sure."

"Then dress yourself and come."

"Wait."

"What for?"

"I have a few more details to ask."

"Can you not ask them during my toilet?"

"I prefer to ask them while we are alone."

"Then be quick, for time passes."

"What is the court to do?"

"Follow me."

"And your brother?"

"Will accompany me."

"Your guards?"

"The French guards with Crillon will wait for me at the Louvre; the Swiss, at the door of the abbey."

"Very good," said Chicot; "I am now informed."

"I can now call?"

"Yes."

Henri rang the bell.

"The ceremony will be magnificent," continued Chicot.

“ I trust God will receive it favorably.”

“ We shall see that to-morrow. But tell me, Henri, before any one comes, have you nothing else to tell me ? ”

“ No. Have I forgotten some detail of the ceremony ? ”

“ I am not speaking of that.”

“ Of what, then, are you speaking ? ”

“ Of nothing.”

“ But you were asking—”

“ If you have quite decided to stop at the Abbey of Sainte-Genevieve ? ”

“ No doubt.”

“ And you will spend the night ? ”

“ I have promised to do so.”

“ Well, if you have nothing more to tell me, I shall tell you that this ceremonial does not suit me.”

“ How so ? ”

“ No ; and when we shall have dined, I shall tell you of another arrangement I wish to propose.”

“ Very well, I consent to it.”

“ Whether you consent or not, my son, it comes to the same.”

“ What do you mean ? ”

“ Hush ! here are your attendants.” As he spoke, the ushers opened the doors and admitted his Majesty’s barber, perfumer, and valet, who, taking possession of the king’s person, began to execute one of those toilets we have described in the early part of this book. When his Majesty was nearly dressed, his Highness, Monseigneur the Duc d’Anjou, was announced.

Henri turned and prepared to greet him with his best smile. The duke was accompanied by MM. de Monsoreau, D’Epernon, and D’Aurilly. D’Epernon and D’Aurilly remained in the background. Henri, at the sight of the count whose pale face was more frightful than ever, could not repress a movement of surprise. The duke perceived this movement, as also did the count.

“ Sire,” said the duke, “ here is M. de Monsoreau who has come to pay homage to your Majesty.”

"Thank you, monsieur," said Henri, "and I appreciate your visit all the more as I heard you had been wounded."

"Yes, sire."

"At the chase, I was told."

"Yes, sire."

"But you are better now, are you not ?"

"I have quite recovered."

"Sire," said the Duc d'Anjou, "after we have made our devotions, would you not be pleased to have M. le Comte de Monsoreau go and prepare a fine chase for us in the woods of Compiègne ?"

"But," said Henri, "do you not know that to-morrow—" He was about to say, "Four of my friends are about to meet four of yours," but he remembered that it had been kept secret, and stopped short.

"I know nothing, sire," replied the Duc d'Anjou ; "but if your Majesty will inform me—"

"I was about to say that as I am to spend the night in devotions at the Abbey of Sainte-Genevieve, I may not be ready. But let Monsieur le Comte go. If it be not for to-morrow, the chase will take place on the day after to-morrow."

"Do you hear ?" said the duke to Monsoreau who bowed. "Yes, monseigneur," he replied.

At this moment Quélus and Schomberg entered. The king received them with open arms.

"One more day," said Quélus, saluting the king.

"Luckily, only one," said Schomberg.

During this time, Monsoreau was saying to the duke :

"You are sending me into exile, monseigneur."

"It is the duty of the master of the hounds to prepare the chase for the king," replied the duke, laughing.

"I understand," said Monsoreau, "and I see how it is. To-night expires the week which your Highness had asked me to wait, and you prefer sending me to Compiègne to keeping your promise. But take care ; before to-night I can by a single word—"

François caught the count by the wrist.

"Hush!" he said; "on the contrary, I am keeping this promise which you ask."

"Explain yourself."

"Your departure for the chase will be known to all since the order is official."

"Well!"

"You will not go, but you will hide near your house. The man whom you wish to know, believing you to be gone, will come; the rest concerns you. I believe I promised nothing more."

"Ah, ah! if that be so," said Monsoreau.

"You have my word," said the duke.

"Better still, monseigneur, I have your signature."

"Ah! *mordieu!* I know it only too well."

The duke left Monsoreau to join his brother; D'Aurilly touched D'Epernon's arm.

"It is done," he said.

"What is done?"

"M. de Bussy will not fight to-morrow."

"M. de Bussy will not fight to-morrow?"

"I can answer for it."

"Who will prevent him?"

"What matters it, provided he does not fight."

"If that should be so, my dear wizard, you shall have one thousand gold crowns."

"Gentlemen," said Henri, who had now completed his toilet, "to Saint-Germain-l'Auxerrois."

"And from there to the Abbey of Sainte-Genevieve?" asked the duke.

"Certainly," replied the king.

"Count upon it," said Chicot, buckling on the belt of his sword, while Henri passed into the gallery where his whole court awaited him.

CHAPTER LXXXVII.

WHICH WILL EXPLAIN THE LAST CHAPTER.

THE night before, after everything had been arranged and settled between the Guises and the Angevins, M. de Monsoreau returned home and found Bussy there. On seeing that brave gentleman for whom he felt great friendship, he realized that as Bussy knew nothing of the anticipated events, he might greatly compromise himself the next day. So taking him to one side, M. de Monsoreau said,—

“ My dear friend, would you permit me to give you a piece of advice ? ”

“ Why, certainly,” replied Bussy, “ I beg you to do so.”

“ In your place, I would leave Paris to-morrow.”

“ I ? And why so ? ”

“ I can only tell you that your absence will probably save you from great embarrassment.”

“ Embarrassment ? ” said Bussy, giving the count a searching look.

“ Are you ignorant of what is to take place to-morrow ? ”

“ Completely.”

“ On your honor ? ”

“ On my word as a gentleman.”

“ M. d’Anjou has confided nothing to you ? ”

“ M. d’Anjou confides to me only those things which he can tell aloud to every one.”

“ Well, I who am not the Duc d’Anjou, I who love my friends for their own sakes and not for my own, I shall tell you, my dear count, that grave events will take place to-morrow, and that the parties of Guise and Anjou are meditating a stroke which may result in the fall of the king.”

Bussy looked at M. de Monsoreau with a little suspicion; but the latter’s face expressed such absolute sincerity that no mistake could possibly be made.

“ Count,” he replied, “ I belong to the Duc d’Anjou as you already know,—that is to say, my life and my arm

are at his command. The king, against whom I have done nothing, dislikes me, and never loses an opportunity to insult me by word or deed. Even to-morrow," added Bussy, in a low voice, " and I say this to you alone,—to-morrow I am going to risk my life in order to humiliate Henri de Valois in the person of his favorites."

" So you are willing to bear the consequences of your attachment to the Duc d'Anjou ? " asked Monsoreau.

" Yes."

" Do you know where that may lead you ? "

" I know where I shall stop ; whatever may be my reasons to complain of the king, I shall never raise my hand against the Lord's anointed. I shall let the others act, and without striking or provoking any one I shall simply follow M. le Duc d'Anjou to defend him in case of danger."

M. de Monsoreau reflected for a moment, then laying his hand on Bussy's shoulder,—

" My dear count," he said, " the Duc d'Anjou is perfidious and treacherous ; a coward, capable, from jealousy or fear, of sacrificing his most faithful servant, his most devoted friend. Follow the advice of a friend, abandon him, spend the day to-morrow at your little house of Vincennes, go where you will, but do not go to the procession of the Fête Dieu."

Bussy looked at him and said,—

" Then why do you follow the duke yourself ? "

" For certain reasons which concern my honor, I have need of him for some time yet."

" Well, I am in the same case," replied Bussy ; " for certain questions of honor, I too must follow the duke."

The Comte de Monsoreau pressed Bussy's hand, and they parted.

We have related, in a preceding chapter, the events which took place at the king's levee.

Monsoreau returned home and announced to his wife his departure for Compiègne ; at the same time he gave orders to have everything in readiness. Diane heard the news with joy. She knew, through her husband, of the

proposed duel between Bussy and D'Epernon, but D'Epernon was the one of the king's favorites who had the least reputation for courage and skill ; she therefore thought of the fight only with fear mingled with pride.

Bussy had gone to the Duc d'Anjou in the morning, and had accompanied him to the Louvre, but had remained in the gallery. He followed the duke when the latter left his brother, and the whole *cortège* went to Saint-Germain-l'Auxerrois.

When he saw Bussy so frank, so loyal, and so devoted, the prince felt some remorse ; but two causes combated in his mind this return to better feelings,—the great influence which Bussy had acquired over him, as every strong nature has over a weak one, and which made him fear that Bussy, standing so near the throne, might eventually be the real king ; then Bussy's love for Madame de Monsoreau awakened all the pangs of jealousy in the heart of the prince.

Yet, as Monsoreau inspired him with as much terror as Bussy, he had said to himself,—

“ Bussy will either accompany me, and by his support win victory to our side,—then if I triumph, what do I care for Monsoreau,—or Bussy will abandon me, in which case I too shall abandon him.”

In consequence of this double reflection, of which Bussy was the object, the prince did not once remove his eyes from the young man. He saw him enter the church with a calm and smiling face, after having courteously made way for M. d'Epernon, his antagonist, and kneel down a little way behind him.

The prince then made a sign to Bussy to come nearer. In his present position he was obliged to turn completely round, whereas, if Bussy were on his left he had but to turn his eyes.

About fifteen minutes later, Rémy entered the church and knelt near his master. The duke started when he saw the young physician whom he knew to be the confidant of Bussy's secret thoughts. After having exchanged a few words in a low tone, Rémy slipped a note into the count's

hand. The prince felt a thrill through his whole body ; the address was written in a charming feminine hand.

"It is from her," he said ; "she sends him word that her husband is about to leave Paris."

Bussy put the note into his hat, opened it, and read it. The prince could not read the note, but he could see Bussy's face radiant with joy and love.

"Ah, woe to you if you do not accompany me," he murmured.

Bussy raised the note to his lips, then placed it over his heart. The duke looked around ; if Monsoreau had been there, François might not have had the patience to wait until evening to denounce Bussy to him. Mass being over, they returned to the Louvre, where a collation awaited the king in his apartments, and the gentlemen in the gallery. The Swiss stood in line at the gates of the Louvre. Crillon and the French guards were in the courtyard.

Chicot watched the king as closely as the Duc d'Anjou watched Bussy. On entering the Louvre, Bussy approached the duke.

"Pardon me, monseigneur," he said, bowing, "I should like to say two words to your Highness."

"Is there any need for haste ?"

"Great haste."

"Can you not tell me during the procession ? We shall walk side by side."

"Monseigneur must pardon me, but I wish to be excused from going."

"How so ?" asked the duke, in a voice from which he was unable to banish all emotion.

"Monseigneur, to-morrow is a great day, since we are to settle the quarrel between France and Anjou ; I should therefore like to retire to my little house of Vincennes, and spend the day in retreat."

"So you will not join the procession with the king and the court ?"

"No, monseigneur, if you will excuse me."

"You will not even join me at Sainte-Genevieve ?"

“ Monseigneur, I wish to have the whole day to myself.”

“ Supposing something should occur during the day when I shall have need of my friends—”

“ As Monseigneur would only need them to draw their swords against the king, I have a double reason for being excused,” replied Bussy ; “ my sword is engaged to M. d’Epernon.”

The night before, Monsoreau had told the duke that he might count on Bussy. All was changed since the night before, and the change was caused by the note which Le Haudoin had brought to the church.

“ So you abandon your lord and master,” said the duke, through his closed teeth.

“ Monseigneur,” said Bussy, “ the man who is about to risk his life in a bloody, mortal duel, as ours will be, has but one master, and that master will have my last devotions.”

“ You know that I am playing for a throne, and you leave me.”

“ Monseigneur, I have worked enough for you, and I shall work again to-morrow. Do not ask me for more than my life.”

“ Very well,” said the duke, in a hollow voice, “ you are free ; go, M. de Bussy.”

Bussy, not heeding this sudden coldness, saluted the prince, descended the steps of the Louvre, and once out of the palace, went quickly towards his house. The duke called D’Aurilly, who appeared at once.

“ Well, monseigneur ? ” asked the lute player.

“ Well, he has condemned himself.”

“ He does not accompany you ? ”

“ No.”

“ He goes to the rendezvous of the note ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ Then it is for this evening ? ”

“ Yes, for this evening.”

“ Is M. de Monsoreau notified ? ”

“ Of the rendezvous, yes,—but not of the man.”

“ Then you have decided to sacrifice the count ? ”

"I have determined to avenge myself," said the prince.
"I now fear but one thing."

"What is that?"

"That Monsoreau will trust to his strength and skill, and allow Bussy to escape him."

"Reassure yourself, monseigneur."

"Why?"

"Is M. de Bussy positively condemned?"

"Yes, *mordieu!* A man who dictates to me; who takes my will from me and substitutes his own; who takes my mistress and makes her his own; a sort of lion of whom I am less the master than the keeper,—yes, D'Aurilly, he is condemned without mercy, and without appeal."

"Well, as I was telling you, monseigneur, be not uneasy; if he escape Monsoreau, he will not escape another."

"Who is this other?"

"Does your Highness command me to name him?"

"Yes, I command you."

"That other is M. d'Epernon."

"D'Epernon who is to fight with him to-morrow?"

"Yes, monseigneur."

"Tell me about it."

D'Aurilly was about to begin the account, when the duke was called. The king was at table, and was surprised at the duke's non-appearance, or rather, Chicot had called his attention to it, and the king summoned his brother.

"You will tell me the whole thing during the procession," said the duke, as he followed the usher. As we shall not have the leisure to follow the duke and D'Aurilly through the streets of Paris, let us tell our readers what had taken place between D'Epernon and the lute player.

One morning, at about daybreak, D'Epernon had presented himself at the Hôtel d'Anjou, and asked for D'Aurilly. The gentleman had long known the musician. The latter had been called to teach him how to play on the lute, and master and pupil frequently played together according to the fashion of those days, both in France and

Spain. The result was that the two musicians were quite intimate. Besides, D'Epernon, who was a subtle Gascon, practised the method of insinuation which consists in reaching the masters through their servants, and there were few secrets in the Duc d'Anjou's household of which he was not informed through his friend D'Aurilly. Let us add that he flattered the king and the duke, floating between the two, fearing to have the future king for an enemy, and wishing to keep the reigning king as his friend.

The object of this visit was to talk about the approaching duel with Bussy. This duel greatly agitated him.

During the whole of his long life courage never was D'Epernon's strongest point. He would have needed more than courage to look forward to this duel with calmness. Fighting with Bussy meant almost certain death. Those who had dared it had fallen, never to rise again.

At the first word spoken by D'Epernon on the subject which he had most at heart, the musician, who knew his master's silent hatred of Bussy, entered into sympathy, and pitied his pupil, telling him that for the past week, Bussy had practised fencing for two hours every morning with a trumpeter of the guards,—the most skilful swordsman in Paris; a sort of artist in sword thrusts who, a traveller and philosopher, had borrowed from the Italians their close and prudent game; from the Spaniards their subtle and brilliant feints; from the Germans firmness of wrist and method of parry and thrust; and finally, from the savage Poles, who were then called Sarmatians, their turns, bounds, sudden prostrations and close embrace, man to man. During this long enumeration of disasters D'Epernon, in his terror, ate all the carmine off his fingernails.

“Then I am a dead man,” he said, half laughing and turning pale.

“Why, yes,” replied D'Aurilly.

“But this is absurd,” cried D'Epernon; “the idea of going to fight with a man who is sure to kill me. It is

just as if one were to play dice with a man who is sure to throw double sixes every time."

" You should have thought of that before accepting, Monsieur le Duc."

" *Peste*," said D'Epernon, " I will break the engagement. I am not a Gascon for nothing. A man is a fool if he willingly gives up his life at twenty-five. But now I think of it, *mordieu*! yes, it is good logic. Listen."

" Speak."

" You say that M. de Bussy is sure to kill me ? "

" I do not doubt it for one moment."

" Then if he is sure, it is no longer a duel, but an assassination."

" Apparently."

" The devil ! if it is an assassination— "

" Well ? "

" It is lawful to prevent an assassination by— "

" What ? "

" By a murder."

" No doubt."

" Since he wishes to kill me, who can prevent my killing him beforehand ? "

" Nothing at all ; I had even thought of that."

" Is my reasoning clear ? "

" Clear as day."

" Natural ? "

" Very natural."

" Only instead of killing him with my own hands, as he intends to do with me, I shall leave the task to others, as I abhor blood."

" That is to say, you will hire assassins ? "

" Yes, as M. de Guise and M. de Mayenne did for Saint Mégrin."

" It will cost you dear."

" I will give three thousand crowns."

" When your assassins will know with whom they are to deal, you will hardly have more than six men for three thousand crowns."

" Are not six enough ? "

"Six men ! M. de Bussy will have killed four before he is even touched. Do you remember the fight in the Rue Saint-Antoine where he wounded you and Schomberg, and nearly broke Quélus' head ? "

"I shall give six thousand crowns if necessary," said D'Epernon. "Mordieu ! If I attempt it, I want the thing done well, so that he may not escape."

"Have you your men ? " asked D'Aurilly.

"Oh ! " said D'Epernon, "I have plenty of innocent men, brave old soldiers, who are well worth those of Venice and Florence."

"Very well, but take care."

"Of what ? "

"If they fail, they will denounce you."

"I have the king on my side."

"That is something, but the king cannot prevent your being killed by M. de Bussy."

"This is very true," said D'Epernon, thoughtfully.

"I might suggest a combination," said D'Aurilly.

"Speak, my friend."

"But you might object to an auxiliary."

"I would object to nothing which would double my chances of getting rid of this mad dog."

"Well, a certain enemy of your enemy is jealous."

"Ah, ah ! "

"And is now laying a snare for him."

"Well."

"But he needs money. With the six thousand crowns he would settle your business and his own at the same time. You are not anxious to have the credit of the thing, I presume ? "

"No, I only wish to remain in the background."

"Send your men to the place of meeting, and he will make use of them without telling your name."

"But if my men do not know me, I should at least know that man."

"I shall point him out to you this morning."

"Where ? "

"At the Louvre."

“ Then he is a gentleman ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ D’Aurilly, the six thousand crowns shall be yours on the spot.”

“ It is settled ? ”

“ Irrevocably.”

“ To the Louvre, then ! ”

“ To the Louvre.”

We have seen in the preceding chapter how D’Aurilly said to D’Epernon, “ Be not uneasy ; M. de Bussy will not fight to-morrow.”

CHAPTER LXXXVIII.

THE PROCESSION.

So soon as the collation was over, the king, accompanied by Chicot, entered his room to put on the penitent’s robe, and came out a few moments later with bare feet, a rope around his waist, and his hood pulled down over his face. The courtiers had made the same toilet.

The weather was magnificent ; the pavement strewn with flowers. All spoke of the altars, each one of which was more beautiful than the last, particularly the one prepared by the monks of Sainte-Genevieve in the crypt of their church. An immense crowd lined the roads leading to the four places where the king was to stop, and which were the convents of the Jacobins, the Carmes, the Capuchins, and Sainte-Genevieve.

The clergy of Saint-Germain-l’Auxerrois led the way. The Archbishop of Paris carried the Blessed Sacrament. Between the clergy and the archbishop were young boys carrying censers and young girls strewing flowers. These walked backwards. Then came the king, followed by his four friends, barefooted and frocked like himself.

The Duc d’Anjou followed in his ordinary dress ; his whole Angevin court accompanied him, mingling with the great dignitaries of the crown, who walked behind the

prince, each occupying the place assigned to him by etiquette.

Then came the *bourgeois* and the people.

It was after one o'clock in the afternoon when they left the Louvre. Crillon and the French guards wished to follow the king, but he made them a sign to remain at the palace. It was nearly six o'clock in the evening when, after having stopped at the different stations, the head of the *cortège* first perceived the porch of the old abbey ; and the monks of Sainte-Genevieve, with the prior at their head, stood on the threshold to receive his Majesty. After leaving the last station, M. le Duc d'Anjou, who had been on his feet since morning, pleaded fatigue. He asked the king's permission to retire to his *hôtel*, and his request was granted at once.

His gentlemen also left the *cortège*, and followed him, thus showing very plainly that they accompanied him and not the king. But the fact is, that as three of them were to fight the next morning, they were anxious not to over-tire themselves.

At the door of the abbey the king, thinking that Quélus, Maugiron, Schomberg, and D'Epernon were quite as much in need of rest as Livarot, Ribeirac, and Antraguet, dismissed them. The archbishop, who was officiating since morning, and had eaten nothing, was exhausted with fatigue, as well as the priests. The king took pity on these holy martyrs, and dismissed them all. Then turning to the prior, Joseph Foulon,—

“ Here I am, father,” he said, in a nasal voice, “ and I come as a sinner to seek rest in your solitude.”

The abbot bowed. Then turning to those who had stood by him the whole day and accompanied him so far, the king said,—

“ Thank you, gentlemen, you may go in peace.”

They all bowed, and the royal penitent slowly mounted the steps of the abbey, striking his breast as he went. No sooner had Henri crossed the threshold of the abbey than the doors were closed behind him.

The king was so buried in thought that he did not seem

to observe this circumstance, which was in no way extraordinary, since he had dismissed his suite.

"We shall first conduct your Majesty to the crypt, which we have ornamented as best we could to do honor to the king of heaven and earth," said the prior.

The king merely made a gesture of assent, and followed the abbot. But he had no sooner passed through the sombre arch beneath which stood two rows of monks, he had no sooner turned the corner of the yard leading to the chapel, than twenty hoods were thrown back, and eyes were seen gleaming with joy and pride.

These were no faces of lazy and cowardly monks ; the thick moustaches and bronzed skins denoted strength and activity. A great many of the faces were scarred, and beside the proudest and most illustrious of all appeared the triumphant and happy face of a woman dressed in a monk's robe. This woman, shaking a pair of golden scissors which hung from her belt, cried,—

"Ah, my brothers, we have the Valois at last ! "

"Upon my word, sister, I believe it," said the Balafré."

"Not yet, not yet," murmured the cardinal.

"How so ? "

"Yes, shall we have enough troops to resist Crillon and his guards ? "

"We have better than troops," replied the Duc de Mayenne, "and, believe me, we shall not exchange a single shot."

"How will you arrange that ? " asked the Duchesse de Montpensier ; "I should have liked a little noise."

"Well, sister, I regret to say that you will have to do without it. When the king is taken he will cry out, but no one will reply to his cries ; then, by persuasion or violence, but without showing ourselves, we will make him sign an abdication. The news will then spread through the city, and dispose the soldiers and *bourgeois* in our favor."

"The plan is a good one, and cannot fail now," said the duchess.

"It is a little brutal," said the Cardinal de Guise, shaking his head.

"The king will refuse to sign the abdication," said the Balafré ; "he is brave and will prefer death."

"Then let him die!" cried Mayenne and the duchess.

"Not at all," firmly replied the Duc de Guise, "not at all. I am willing to succeed to a prince who abdicates and who is despised ; but I do not wish to take the place of a murdered man who will be pitied. Besides, in your plans you seem to forget that if the king is killed, M. le Duc d'Anjou will claim the crown."

"Let him claim it, *mordieu!*!" said Mayenne ; "our brother the cardinal had anticipated that difficulty. M. le Duc d'Anjou is included in his brother's abdication ; M. le Duc d'Anjou has had relations with the Huguenots ; he is unworthy of reigning."

"With the Huguenots ? Are you sure ?"

"*Pardieu!* did he not escape with the aid of the King of Navarre ?"

"Well ?"

"Then follows another clause in favor of our house ; this clause makes my brother lieutenant of the kingdom, and from lieutenancy to royalty there is but one step."

"Yes, yes," said the cardinal ; "I have foreseen all that ; but in order to ascertain that the abdication is a genuine and voluntary one, the French guards may storm the abbey. Crillon does not understand jests, and he is the kind of man to say to the king, 'Sire, there may be danger of life, but first of all we must save our honor.'"

"This concerns the general," said Mayenne, "and the general has taken his precautions. To sustain a siege, we have here eighty gentlemen, and I have distributed arms to one hundred monks. We could resist an army for one month, without counting that in case of defeat there is the subterranean passage through which we can escape with our prey."

"What is the Duc d'Anjou doing at this moment ?"

"At the hour of danger he always weakens. The Duc

d'Anjou has returned home, and is no doubt waiting for news from us through Bussy or Monsoreau."

" Eh, *mon Dieu* ! he should be here and not at home."

" I think you are mistaken, brother," said the cardinal ; " the people and nobles would have seen in that union of the two brothers a snare to entrap the family. As I said just now, we must above all be careful not to play the part of usurpers : we inherit, and nothing more. In leaving the Duc d'Anjou free, and the queen-mother independent, we shall win approbation and admiration from all sides, and no one will have a word to say. Otherwise, we should have Bussy and a hundred very dangerous swords against us."

" Pshaw ! Bussy is going to fight against the king's favorites to-morrow."

" *Pardieu* ! he will kill them, and then join us," said the Duc de Guise ; " as for me, I shall make him general of an army in Italy, where war is sure to break out. The lord of Bussy is a superior man whom I greatly esteem."

" And as a proof that I do not esteem him less than you do, if I become a widow I shall marry him," said the Duchesse de Montpensier.

" Marry him !" cried Mayenne.

" Yes, women of nobler birth have done even more for him, and at that time he was not even a general."

" Come, come," said Mayenne, " we shall see about this later ; to work now ! "

" Who is with the king ? " asked Guise.

" The prior and Brother Gorenfot, I believe," said the cardinal ; " he must first be surrounded only by familiar faces, otherwise he would be frightened."

" Yes," said Mayenne, " we can eat the fruits of the conspiracy, but we must not pluck them."

" Is he already in the cell ? " asked Madame de Montpensier, anxious to give the king the third crown she had so long been promising him.

" Oh, no ! he will first visit the crypt, then the relics."

" And then ? "

" The prior will speak a few high sounding words on

the vanity of worldly goods ; after which, Brother Gorenflot, you know the one who preached the magnificent sermon on the evening of the League—”

“ Yes, yes.”

“ Brother Gorenflot will try to obtain from his conviction what we are reluctant to wrest from his weakness.”

“ That would indeed be much better,” said the duke, thoughtfully.

“ Pshaw ! ” said Mayenne, “ Henri is weak and superstitious ; I am sure he will yield to the fear of hell.”

“ I am less sure,” said the duke, “ but we have burned our ships, and can no longer retreat. After the prior’s attempt and Gorenflot’s speech, if both fail we will try the last resort,—intimidation.”

“ And then I shall shear my Valois,” said the duchess, who always returned to her favorite hobby. At this moment a bell sounded.

“ The king is descending to the crypt,” said the Duc de Guise ; “ call your friends, Mayenne, and let us again become monks.”

The hoods immediately concealed the bold faces, sparkling eyes, and well-known scars ; then thirty or forty monks, led by the three brothers, went towards the opening of the crypt.

CHAPTER LXXXIX.

CHICOT I.

THE king was absorbed in a meditation which promised an easy success to the projects of MM. de Guise. He visited the crypt with the whole community, kissed the shrine, and struck his breast while he muttered the most doleful psalms. The prior began his exhortations, to which the prince listened with the same signs of fervent contrition. Presently, on a signal from the Duc de Guise, Joseph Foulon bowed before the king, and said,—

"Sire, will it please you now to come and lay your terrestrial crown at the feet of your eternal father?"

"Let us go," said the king, simply; and followed by the whole community, he wended his way towards the cells, to which a passage on the left conducted. Henri seemed very much affected. He continued to beat his breast, and the chaplet of death heads rattled at his side. They finally reached the cell, on the threshold of which stood Gorenflot with a flushed face and eyes shining like carbuncles.

"Here?" asked the king.

"Right here," replied the fat monk. The king could hesitate because at the end of the corridor was a door, or rather, a mysterious grating, opening into darkness. Henri entered the cell.

"Hic portis salutis?" he murmured.

"Yes," replied Foulon, "this is the haven."

"Leave us," said Gorenflot, with a majestic gesture. The door was immediately closed, and retreating footsteps were heard. The king spied a stool, and seated himself with both hands on his knees.

"Ah, here you are, Herod, Pagan, Nebuchadnezzar!" said Gorenflot, suddenly, as he placed his fat hands on his hips. The king seemed surprised.

"Are you speaking to me, brother?" he asked.

"Yes, to you. Can I call you by any name that will not become you?"

"Brother," murmured the king.

"There is no brother here. I have long been meditating a sermon, and you shall have it. I divide it into three parts, like every good preacher. First, you are a tyrant; secondly, you are a satyr; thirdly, you are dethroned. I shall speak on these subjects."

"Dethroned, brother!" exclaimed the king.

"Neither more nor less. This is not like Poland, and you shall not escape—"

"Ah, a snare!"

"Oh, Valois, learn that a king is but a man!"

"You are violent, brother."

“ *Pardieu !* do you think we imprison you to flatter you ? ”

“ You abuse the cloak of religion.”

“ Is there a religion ? ” asked Gorenflot.

“ Oh, you are a saint, and you say such things ! ”

“ Never mind ; I have spoken.”

“ You will be damned.”

“ Is there any damnation ? ”

“ You speak like an infidel, brother.”

“ Come, no preaching. Are you ready, Valois ? ”

“ To do what ? ”

“ To give up your crown. I am sent to demand that of you.”

“ You are committing a mortal sin.”

“ Oh,” said Gorenflot, “ I have the right of absolution, and I absolve myself in advance. Come, renounce, Brother Valois.”

“ To what ? ”

“ To the throne of France.”

“ I would rather die than do that.”

“ Then you will die. Here is the prior, make up your mind.”

“ I have my guards, my friends. I shall defend myself.”

“ That may be, but you will first be killed.”

“ Give me, at least, a moment for reflection.”

“ Not one minute, not one second.”

“ Your zeal carries you away, my friend,” said the prior, and with his hand he made a gesture that meant,—

“ Sire, your request is granted,” and he closed the door. Henri fell into a profound meditation.

“ I accept the sacrifice,” he said, after reflecting about ten minutes. Some one knocked at the door.

“ It is done,” said Gorenflot ; “ he accepts.”

The king heard a murmur of joy and surprise in the corridor.

“ Read the act to him,” said a voice which startled the king to such a degree that he looked through the grating. A roll of parchment passed from the monk’s hand to that

of Gorenflot, who read the act. The king, whose sorrow was great, listened, with his head buried in his hands.

"And if I refuse to sign?" he asked in a tearful voice.

"You will doubly ruin yourself," replied the Duc de Guise, from under his hood. "Consider yourself as dead to the world, and do not compel subjects to shed the blood of a man who has been their king."

"I will not be forced."

"I feared this," murmured the duke to his sister, who frowned while her eyes glittered with a sinister light.

"Go, brother," he said to Mayenne, "let every one arm and prepare."

"For what?" asked the king, in a plaintive tone.

"For everything," replied Joseph Foulon.

The king's despair increased.

"Corbleu!" cried Gorenflot; "I hated you, Valois, but now I despise you. Sign, or you shall perish from my hand."

"Have patience," said the king. "Let me pray to my divine master for resignation."

"He wishes to reflect longer," cried Gorenflot.

"Give him until midnight," said the cardinal.

"Thanks, charitable Christian," said the king, in a paroxysm of grief. "May God reward you!"

"His brain was really enfeebled," said the Duc de Guise, "we are serving France in deposing him."

"No matter," said the duchess, "enfeebled as he is, I shall take pleasure in clipping him."

During this dialogue, Gorenflot, with folded arms, was uttering the most violent insults, and reproaching the king with all his disorders. Suddenly a dull noise was heard outside of the convent.

"Silence," cried the Duc de Guise. The most profound silence now reigned, and regular blows could be heard to strike against the resounding door of the abbey. Mayenne came running as quickly as his rotundity would permit.

"Brothers," he said, "there is a troop of armed men outside."

"They have come for him," said the duchess.

"All the more reason for him to sign quickly," said the cardinal.

"Sign, Valois; sign," said Gorenfot, in a thundering voice.

"You gave me until midnight," piteously said the king.

"Ah, you retract because you hope to be rescued."

"No doubt, I have a chance—"

"To die if he does not sign at once," said the shrill and imperious voice of the duchess.

Gorenfot caught the king by the wrist and gave him a pen. The noise outside increased.

"A new troop," cried a monk, "they are surrounding the abbey on the left."

"Come," said Mayenne and the duchess impatiently.

The king dipped the pen in the ink.

"The Swiss," cried the prior, "are occupying the cemetery on the left. The whole abbey will soon be surrounded."

"Well, we shall defend ourselves," resolutely replied Mayenne. "With such a hostage in our hands, we shall never be forced to an unconditional surrender."

"He has signed," ejaculated Gorenfot, tearing the paper from Henri, who buried his face in his hands.

"Then you are king," said the cardinal to the duke.

"Take away that precious paper."

The king, yielding to a paroxysm of despair, overturned the only lamp which lighted the scene; but the duke already held the parchment.

"What shall we do?" asked a monk, beneath whose robe was visible the costume of a gentleman, completely armed. "Crillon is here with French guards and threatens to break open the doors. Listen—"

"In the king's name!" cried Crillon's powerful voice.

"There is no more king," cried Gorenfot, through a window.

"Who says that, scoundrel?" asked Crillon.

"I, I," said Gorenfot, proudly.

"Let some one see this rascal and send a few bullets

into his carcass," said Crillon ; and Gorenfot, seeing the muskets aimed at him, fell back into the room.

"Break in the doors, Monsieur Crillon," said a voice, the sound of which made the hair of all the monks, real or pretended, stand on end. It was the voice of a man who left the ranks and advanced to the steps of the abbey.

"Yes, sire," said Crillon, striking a terrific blow in the door with his axe. The door groaned.

"What do you want?" said the prior, appearing at the window in great agitation.

"Ah, it is you, Messire Foulon," said the same calm and haughty voice, "I want my jester who came to spend the night in one of your cells. I want Chicot ; I am lonely at the Louvre."

"And I am greatly amused, my son," replied Chicot, throwing back his hood and passing through the crowd of monks who recoiled with a cry of terror. At this moment, the Duc de Guise, who had sent for a lamp, read the signature obtained with so much labor.

"Chicot I.!"

"I, Chicot I.!" he cried, "a thousand damnations."

"Ah," said Chicot, turning to Gorenfot who was nearly fainting, and he began to strike him with the cord he had around his waist.

CHAPTER XC.

PRINCIPAL AND INTEREST.

As the king spoke, and as the conspirators recognized him, they passed from amazement to terror. The abdication signed "Chicot I." changed this terror into rage. Chicot threw back his hood upon his shoulders, folded his arms, and while Gorenfot fled at his utmost speed, sustained, firm and smiling, the first shock. The furious gentlemen advanced on the Gascon, fully determined to be revenged on him for the cruel mystification of which they had been the victims.

But this man without weapons, whose breast was covered only by his arms ; this mocking face which seemed to defy so much strength with its very weakness, arrested their steps even more than the remonstrances of the cardinal who made them observe that Chicot's death could serve no end, but, on the contrary, would be terribly avenged by the king who was the jester's accomplice in this scene of terrible buffoonery.

The daggers and swords were accordingly lowered before Chicot who continued to laugh at them, either from devotion, a thing of which he was quite capable, or because he read their secret thoughts. However, the king's threats and Crillon's blows became more pressing. It was evident that the door could not long resist such an attack, which no attempt was made to repel : therefore, after a moment's pause, the Duc de Guise gave the orders for retreat. This order made Chicot smile.

During the nights he had spent in meditation with Gorenflot, he had examined the cellar. He had found the outlet, and pointed it out to the king, who had placed there Tocquenot, lieutenant of the Swiss guards. It was evident that the Leaguers would go, one after another, and throw themselves into the trap.

The cardinal was the first to disappear, followed by about twenty gentlemen. Then Chicot saw the duke pass with about the same number, and then Mayenne, whose corpulence naturally assigned to him the task of bringing up the rearguard. When the Duc de Mayenne had passed the door of the cell, Chicot no longer smiled : he laughed outright. Ten minutes elapsed, during which Chicot listened attentively, expecting at every moment to hear the noise of the Leaguers as they were repulsed in the cellar ; but to his great surprise, the noise instead of growing louder, seemed to die away.

All at once a thought flashed through his mind, and changed his smile into anger. The Leaguers did not return. Had they found the door guarded, and discovered some other outlet ? Chicot was about to rush from the cell, when the door was suddenly blocked by an

enormous mass which fell at his feet and began to tear its hair.

“ Oh, wretch that I am ! ” cried the monk. “ Oh, my good Monsieur Chicot, forgive me, forgive me ! ”

Why did Gorenflot, who was the first to go, now return alone, when he should already have been far away ? This question naturally presented itself to Chicot’s mind.

“ Oh, my good Monsieur Chicot ! ” he continued to cry, “ pardon your unworthy friend who repents at your feet.”

“ But why did you not escape with the others ? ” asked Chicot.

“ Because in his anger, the Lord has struck me with obesity, and I could not get through where the others did. Oh, cursed belly ! oh, miserable paunch ! ” cried the monk, striking with his clinched fist that part of his anatomy which he thus addressed. “ Oh ! why am I not thin like you, Monsieur Chicot ? How beautiful, and above all, how lucky it is to be thin ! ”

Chicot could understand nothing of the monk’s lamentations.

“ Are the others escaping somewhere ? ” he asked, in a voice of thunder.

“ *Pardieu !* ” said the monk, “ what should they do,—wait to be hanged ? Oh, wretched paunch ! ”

“ Silence, and answer me.”

Gorenflot raised himself on his knees. “ Question me, Monsieur Chicot,” he said, “ you surely have the right to do so.”

“ How are the others escaping ? ”

“ As fast as they can.”

“ I understand, but where ? ”

“ Through the ventilator.”

“ *Mordieu !* through what ventilator ? ”

“ The one that opens into the graveyard vault.”

“ Is that what you call the cellar ? Answer quickly.”

“ No, my dear Monsieur Chicot, the cellar door was guarded on the outside. Just as he was about to open it, the great cardinal heard a Swiss outside say, ‘ *Mich durstet*,’ which means, ‘ I am thirsty.’ ”

"*Ventre de biche !*" cried Chicot, "I know what that means ; so the fugitives have taken some other way ?"

"Yes, dear Monsieur Chicot, they are escaping through the graveyard vault."

"Which opens ?"

"On one side into the crypt ; on the other, under the Porte Saint-Jacques."

"You lie."

"I, dear lord ?"

"If they had escaped through the vault opening into the crypt, I should have seen them pass before your cell."

"Exactly, dear Monsieur Chicot ; they thought they had no time for that, so they crept through the air-hole."

"Which one ?"

"The one that opens into the garden, and serves to light the passage."

"So that you—"

"I was too big and could not get through, and they drew me back by the legs because I intercepted the passage for the others."

"But," cried Chicot, whose face suddenly expressed strange joy, "if you were unable to pass—"

"I made every effort. See my shoulders and breast."

"Then he who is bigger than you—"

"He ! who ?"

"Oh, *mon Dieu !*" said Chicot, "if you help me in this matter, you shall have my eternal gratitude. Neither will he be able to pass."

"Monsieur Chicot."

"Get up."

The monk rose as quickly as he could.

"Now take me to the air-hole."

"Wherever you wish, dear friend."

"Then lead the way."

Gorenflot trotted as fast as he was able, from time to time raising his arms to Heaven, while Chicot stimulated his pace by striking him with the cord. They both traversed the corridor and descended into the garden.

“ This way,” said Gorenflot.

“ Hold your tongue, and go on.”

Gorenflot made a last effort, and reached a clump of trees whence came the sound of groans.

“ There it is,” he said, as he fell exhausted on the grass. Chicot advanced three steps, and saw something wriggling on the ground. By the side of this something, which resembled the animal called by Diogenes a rooster with two feet and no feathers, was a frock and sword. It was evident that the individual so unfortunately placed in the hole had gradually divested himself of all objects which could increase his size. He was now reduced to his utmost simplicity ; yet, like Gorenflot, he made fruitless efforts to disappear completely.

“ *Morbleu ! ventrebleu ! sangdieu !*” cried the smothered voice of the fugitive. “ I would rather pass through the guards. Do not pull so hard, my friends ; I shall come through gradually ; I feel that I am advancing, not quickly,—but I am advancing.”

“ *Ventre de biche !* it is M. de Mayenne,” murmured Chicot with delight.

“ I have not been surnamed Hercules for nothing,” resumed the voice ; “ I shall raise that stone,” and he made such a violent effort that the stone shook.

“ Wait,” said Chicot, “ just wait,” and he made a noise with his feet like some one running fast.

“ They are coming,” said several voices in the cellar.

“ Ah,” said Chicot, as if out of breath,—“ ah, here you are, wretched monk.”

“ Do not speak, monseigneur,” said several voices ; “ they take you for Gorenflot.”

“ Ah, here you are, heavy mass,—*pondus immobile* ; take this, *indigesta moles*, take this.”

And at each apostrophe, Chicot, who had now found the long-wished-for opportunity for vengeance, used with all his might the rope with which he had already chastised Gorenflot.

“ Silence,” said the voices, “ they take you for the monk.”

Mayenne only gave vent to smothered groans, while he made frantic efforts to raise the stone.

"Ah, conspirator," continued Chicot, "unworthy monk, this is for your drunkenness, your laziness, your bad temper, your greediness. I regret that there are only seven capital sins. This is for all your vices."

"Monsieur Chicot," said Gorenfot, dripping with perspiration,—"Monsieur Chicot, have pity on me!"

"Ah, traitor!" cried Chicot, striking harder, "this is for your treason."

"Spare me," murmured Gorenfot, who thought he felt all the blows received by Mayenne,—"spare me, dear Monsieur Chicot."

But Chicot, intoxicated by vengeance, only increased his blows. However great his power of self-control, Mayenne could not repress his groans.

"Ah," continued Chicot, "why did it not please God to substitute for your vulgar, plebeian carcass the high and mighty shoulders of the Duc de Mayenne to whom I owe a volley of blows, the interest of which has been accumulating for seven years."

Gorenfot sighed and fell.

"Chicot!" vociferated the duke.

"Yes, it is I, in person. I, unworthy servant of the king, weak man who would like to have a hundred arms for this occasion." Chicot, becoming more and more excited, repeated the blows with such violence that the sufferer made a tremendous effort, and in a paroxysm of pain raised the stone and fell torn and bleeding into the arms of his friends. Chicot's last blow fell into empty space. He then turned round. The real Gorenfot had fainted from terror, if not from pain.

CHAPTER XCI.

WHAT WAS TAKING PLACE NEAR THE BASTILLE WHILE CHICOT WAS PAYING HIS DEBTS AT THE ABBEY OF SAINTE-GENEVIEVE.

IT was eleven o'clock at night, the Duc d'Anjou was in his study, whither he had retired on his return from the procession, and was impatiently awaiting a messenger from the Duc de Guise to announce the downfall of the king his brother. He walked up and down, from the door to the window, and from the window to the door, watching the great clock whose hands moved slowly in their gilded frame.

Suddenly he heard the gallop of a horse in the courtyard; he thought it might be his messenger, and ran to the balcony, but this horse was held by a groom, and awaited its master. The master came out of the apartments; it was Bussy, who as captain of the guards came to give the password for the night before going to his rendezvous.

The duke, on perceiving the brave and handsome young man who had never given him any cause for complaint, felt a moment's remorse; but as Bussy came near the torch held by the groom, his face expressed so much joy, happiness, and hope that all the duke's jealousy returned.

But Bussy, ignorant of the fact that François was watching him and reading the expression of his face, gave the password, rolled his cloak over his shoulders, jumped on his horse, put spurs into its sides, and galloped away.

The duke, who was uneasy at seeing no one come, thought for one instant of sending after him, because he was very sure that before going to the Bastille, Bussy would stop at his *hôtel*; but he pictured to himself the young man laughing with Diane at his love, and placing him, the prince, on the same level with the despised husband; and this time again his evil instincts conquered the good ones.

Bussy had smiled happily as he rode away ; this smile was an insult to the prince who let him go ; had he looked sad and dejected, the prince might have called him.

Bussy was no sooner out of the Hôtel d'Anjou than he moderated his pace as if he had feared the sound of his own footsteps, and stopping at his own house, gave his horse in charge to a groom who was patiently listening to a demonstration by Rémy.

"Ah, ah," said Bussy, recognizing the young doctor, "is this you, Rémy?"

"Yes, monseigneur, in person."

"And not yet in bed?"

"I shall be there in ten minutes, monseigneur ; I have just come home. Indeed, since I no longer have a patient, it seems to me that the days have forty-eight hours."

"Are you bored?"

"I am afraid so."

"And love?"

"Ah, I have often told you that I am wary of love. In general, I only try it for the sake of experiments."

"So Gertrude is abandoned?"

"Entirely."

"You wearied of her?"

"I rather wearied of being beaten. That was my amazon's method of showing love."

"And your heart does not speak for her to-night?"

"Why to-night, monseigneur?"

"Because I would have taken you with me."

"To the Bastille?"

"Yes."

"You are going there?"

"Yes."

"And Monsoreau?"

"Is at Compiègne, my dear fellow, preparing a hunt for his Majesty."

"Are you sure, monseigneur?"

"The order was publicly given this morning."

" Ah ! "

Rémy became thoughtful.

" Well then ? " he asked, after a pause.

" Then I spent the day in thanking God for the happiness he sent me for to-night, and I shall spend the night in the enjoyment of that happiness."

" Get my sword, Jourdain," said Rémy. The groom disappeared into the house.

" Have you changed your mind ? " said Bussy.

" How so ? "

" You are taking your sword."

" Yes, I shall accompany you as far as the door for two reasons."

" What are they ? "

" First, lest you should meet enemies."

Bussy smiled.

" Eh, *mon Dieu* ! yes. Laugh, monseigneur, I know you do not fear evil encounters, and that Rémy is but a poor companion ; but two men are less easily attacked than one. The second is that I have a great deal of good advice for you."

" Come, my dear Rémy, we shall talk of her. Next to seeing the woman we love, I know no greater happiness than to speak of her."

" There are even people who put the pleasure of talking about her above that of seeing her."

" The weather looks very doubtful," said Bussy.

" All the more reason ; the sky is alternately clear and cloudy. I like variety. Thank you, Jourdain," he said to the groom who gave him his sword. Then turning to the count, " I am at your orders, monseigneur."

Bussy took the young doctor's arm and both went towards the Bastille. Rémy had told the count that he had a great deal of advice to give him, and no sooner had they started than the young doctor began to make a number of high-sounding Latin quotations, the object of which was to persuade Bussy that instead of visiting Diane, he had better spend a good night in bed, because a man usually fights poorly when he has slept badly. Then

he changed to mythology, and proved how Venus usually disarmed Mars.

Bussy smiled ; Rémy insisted.

“ You see, Rémy,” said the count, “ when my arm holds a sword it becomes so identified with it that the fibres of the flesh take the hardness and spring of steel ; while on the other hand, the steel seems to warm and vivify into living flesh. From that moment, my sword is an arm and my arm is a sword. So you see, this is no question of mood or strength ; a blade cannot be tired.”

“ No, but it can become dull.”

“ Fear nothing.”

“ Ah ! my dear master,” continued Rémy, “ to-morrow you enter into a combat which must rank like that of Hercules against Anteus, that of Theseus against the Minotaur, that of Bayard,—something Homeric, gigantic, impossible. In future times Bussy’s fight must be taken as the typical one, and I do not want your skin to be even scratched.”

“ Be not uneasy, my good Rémy, you shall see wonders. This morning I put swords in the hands of four fencers, who during eight minutes did not touch me once while I tore their doublets to pieces. I bounded like a tiger.”

“ I do not deny that ; but will your muscles of to-day be your muscles of to-morrow ? ”

Here Bussy and his surgeon began a Latin dialogue which was frequently interrupted by bursts of laughter. They thus reached the end of the Rue Saint-Antoine.

“ Farewell,” said Bussy, “ here we are.”

“ Suppose I should wait for you ? ”

“ Why so ? ”

“ To be sure that you will be home within two hours, that you may have at least five or six good hours’ sleep before your duel.”

“ If I give you my word ? ”

“ Oh ! that will be sufficient. *Peste !* I should never think of doubting Bussy’s word.”

" Well, you have it. In two hours I shall be at the *hôtel*."

" Then adieu, monseigneur."

" Adieu, Rémy."

The two young men separated ; but Rémy remained on the spot. He saw the count approach the house, and, as Monsoreau's absence gave him great security, enter through the door which was opened by Gertrude, and not through the window. Then he turned to go home, looking philosophically down the deserted streets. As he came to the Place Beaudoyer, he saw five men enveloped in cloaks, and seeming entirely armed under these cloaks.

Five men at this hour,—it was an event ; and he wisely hid in the corner of a house. When they arrived within ten feet of him they stopped, and after exchanging a cordial good-night four took one road, while the fifth remained motionless and thoughtful. At this moment the moon came out from behind a cloud, and its rays fell upon the man's face.

" M. de Saint-Luc ! " cried Rémy.

Saint-Luc raised his head on hearing his name, and saw a man coming towards him.

" Rémy ! " he cried in turn.

" In person, and I am happy to say not at your service, because you seem to enjoy perfect health. Is it an indiscretion to inquire what your lordship is doing at this hour, so far from the Louvre ? "

" No, in obedience to the king's orders, I am examining the physiognomy of the city. He said to me, ' Saint-Luc, walk through the streets of the city, and if you happen to hear that I have abdicated, you may boldly deny it.' "

" Have you heard anything of that ? "

" No one has mentioned it to me. Now, as it is nearly midnight and I met no one but Monsoreau, I dismissed my friends, and was about to go home when you saw me reflecting."

" What ? M. de Monsoreau ! "

" Yes."

" You met M. de Monsoreau ? "

“ With a troop of armed men, ten or twelve at least.”

“ M. de Monsoreau ! Impossible.”

“ Why is it impossible ? ”

“ Because he must be at Compiègne.”

“ He should have been, but he is not.”

“ But the king’s order ? ”

“ Pshaw ! who obeys the king ? ”

“ You met M. de Monsoreau with ten or twelve men ? ”

“ Certainly.”

“ Did he recognize you ? ”

“ I believe so.”

“ You were only five ? ”

“ My four friends and I, no more.”

“ And he did not throw himself upon you ? ”

“ On the contrary, he avoided me, and this surprised me. When I recognized him, I expected a horrible fight.”

“ Which way was he going ? ”

“ Towards the Rue de la Tixeranderie.”

“ Ah ! *mon Dieu !* ” cried Rémy.

“ What ? ” asked Saint-Luc, frightened by the young man’s tone.

“ Monsieur de Saint-Luc, a great misfortune is about to happen.”

“ A great misfortune ! To whom ? ”

“ To M. de Bussy.”

“ To Bussy ! *mordieu !* speak, Rémy, I am his friend as you know.”

“ What a misfortune ! M. de Bussy believed him to be at Compiègne.”

“ Well ? ”

“ He thought he could take advantage of his absence.”

“ So that— ”

“ He is now at Madame Diane’s.”

“ Ah ! ” said Saint-Luc, “ this becomes complicated.”

“ Yes. Do you understand ? ” said Rémy. “ He suspected something or was warned, and feigned to depart that he might appear suddenly.”

“ Wait a second, ” said Saint-Luc, striking his forehead.

“ Have you an idea ? ”

" There is the Duc d'Anjou under all this."

" But the Duc d'Anjou suggested M. de Monsoreau's departure this morning."

" All the more reason. Have you good lungs, my brave Rémy ?"

" *Corbleu !* like bellows."

" In that case, let us run without losing a moment. You know the house ? "

" Yes."

" Then lead the way." And the two young men started through the streets at a pace which would have done honor to hunted deer.

" Has he much advance ? " asked Rémy.

" Who, Monsoreau ? "

" Yes."

" About fifteen minutes," said Saint-Luc, vaulting over a pile of stones five feet high.

" Provided we get there in time," said Rémy, drawing his sword to be ready for any emergency.

CHAPTER XCII.

THE ASSASSINATION.

BUSSY, himself free from uneasiness or hesitation, had been fearlessly received by Diane who was sure of her husband's absence. Never had the beautiful young woman been so joyous ; never had Bussy been so happy. At certain moments, the gravity of which is felt by the soul or the instinct of self-preservation, man unites his moral faculties to all that his senses can furnish him in the way of physical resources ; he concentrates and multiplies himself. With all his energies he enjoys life which he may lose at any moment, though he cannot guess through what catastrophe.

Diane was agitated, all the more so because she tried to conceal her agitation. Moved by her fears for the threatening morrow, she seemed more tender, because

sadness coming into love gives to this love the poetry that it lacks. True passion is never gay, and the eyes of a woman truly in love are more often tearful than brilliant. So she began by checking the amorous young man. What she had to tell him that evening was that her life was his ; what she had to discuss with him was the surest way to escape.

It was not sufficient to conquer ; after having conquered, the king's anger was to be feared, as it was not probable that Henri would ever pardon the defeat or death of his favorites.

" And then," said Diane, with her arms round Bussy's neck, while her eyes rested on his face, " are you not the bravest man in France ? Why should you take pride in the increase of your honor ? You are already so superior to others that it would not be generous to try and win greater fame. You do not wish to please other women, for you love me, and would fear to lose me. Louis, defend your life ! I do not say, Think of death ; because I do not think there exists a man strong enough to kill my Louis, except by treason. But think of the wounds ; you may be wounded, and you know it, since it is to a wound received in fighting these same men that I owe your acquaintance."

" Do not be uneasy," said Bussy, laughing. " I shall guard my face. I do not wish to be disfigured."

" Oh, take care of your whole self, as if you were I. Think of the grief you would feel if you saw me brought back wounded and bleeding. Well, I would feel the same pain at the sight of your blood. Be prudent, my brave lion. This is my recommendation. Do like that Roman whose story you read to me the other day. Let your three friends do their fighting ; aid the one who needs it most ; but if two or three men attack you at once, fly. You will turn like Horatius and kill them one after the other."

" Yes, dearest Diane," said Bussy.

" Oh, you answer without hearing me, Louis ; you look at me, and do not listen to me."

"Yes, but I see you, and you are very beautiful."

"Do not think of my beauty, now. *Mon Dieu!* I am thinking of your life,—of our life. What I am about to say is very dreadful, but I want you to know it; you will be more prudent. I shall have the courage to witness this duel."

"You?"

"Yes."

"How so? It is impossible."

"No, listen; in the room next to this, there is a window opening into a little court and with a side view of the Tournelles."

"Yes, I remember; it overlooks an iron railing, and from there I threw crumbs to the birds the other day."

"From there I shall see you. Above all, place yourself in a way for me to see you; you will know that I am there, and you can see me yourself. But no, foolish woman that I am, do not look at me lest your enemy should profit by it."

"And kill me while my eyes are fixed on you. If I could choose my death, Diane, that is the one I would take."

"Yes, but you are not condemned. This is no time for death; you must think of living."

"And I shall live, you may be sure. Besides, I shall be well seconded; you do not know my friends, but I know them. Antraguet uses his sword as well as I do. Ribeirac is so cool that the only living things about him seem to be his eyes with which he watches his antagonist, and the arm with which he strikes. Livarot has the activity of a tiger. The advantage is ours; I wish there were more danger, to win more glory."

"Well, I believe you, and I smile because I hope; but listen to me, and promise to obey me."

"Yes, provided you do not order me to leave you."

"That is just what I mean to do, and I appeal to your reason."

"Then you should not have made me mad."

"No nonsense, but obedience,—that is the way to prove your love."

"Order then."

"Your eyes are heavy, dearest; you need a good night's rest; leave me."

"What, already?"

"I shall say my prayers, and you will kiss me."

"But one ought to pray to you as to the angels."

"And do you think that the angels do not pray to God?" said Diane, kneeling down. And looking upwards with a gaze which must have reached Heaven: "Lord," she prayed, "if thou art willing that thy servant should live happily and not die of despair, protect him whom thou hast sent on my path, and let me love him, and him alone."

She had just finished these words, and Bussy had thrown his arm around her to raise her face to his, when a window-pane was suddenly smashed in, then the window itself was broken, and three armed men appeared on the balcony, while a fourth one stepped over the balustrade. This one had his face concealed by a mask; in his left hand he held a pistol, and in his right a naked sword.

Bussy remained for a moment paralyzed by the frightful scream which Diane uttered at this sight. The masked man made a sign, and his three companions advanced. One of the men carried a musket. Bussy pushed Diane aside with his left hand, and drew his sword with his right. Then bending backwards he slowly lowered it without once losing sight of his adversaries.

"Come, my brave fellows," said a sepulchral voice from beneath the mask, "he is already half dead with fear."

"You are wrong," said Bussy, "I never feel fear."

Diane made a movement to draw near him.

"Stand aside, Diane," he said firmly; but Diane, instead of obeying, threw herself a second time on his neck.

"You will get me killed, madame." Diane moved away. She understood that she could only aid her lover by passive obedience.

"Ah!" said the hollow voice, "it is M. de Bussy; I

would not believe it, fool that I am. Really, what a good and excellent friend."

Bussy bit his lips and remained silent ; he was looking around for the best means of defence when it came to blows.

" He hears," continued the terrible voice, in a mocking tone which made it seem even more terrible,—" he hears that the master of the hounds is absent, leaving his wife alone ; he fears she may be afraid and comes to keep her company. And when does he come ? On the eve of a duel. I repeat, what a good and excellent friend he is."

" Ah ! it is you, M. de Monsoreau," said Bussy. " Well, remove your mask. Now, I know with whom I have to deal."

" I shall do so," said the master of the hounds, and he threw away the velvet mask.

Diane uttered a feeble cry. The count's pallor was that of a corpse, while his smile was that of a demon.

" Let us put an end to this, monsieur," said Bussy. " I do not like noisy ways. It was very well for Homer's heroes to speak before acting : they were demi-gods ; but I am a man, and not afraid. Attack me or let me pass."

Monsoreau replied by a hoarse, shrill laugh, which made Diane start, but which roused Bussy's anger.

" Let me pass," repeated the young man, whose blood now left his heart and rushed to his head.

" Oh, oh ! " said Monsoreau ; " let you pass ! how you ask for that ! "

" Then draw your sword and have done. I wish to be home, and have far to go."

" You had come to sleep here, monsieur, and you shall do so," replied the master of the hounds.

During this time two more men appeared over the balcony and took their places beside their companions.

" Four and two are six," said Bussy. " Where are the others ? "

" They are waiting at the door," said Monsoreau.

Diane fell upon her knees, and notwithstanding her

efforts, Bussy could hear her sobs. He gave her a rapid glance, then looking at the count,—

“ My dear monsieur,” he said, after a short pause, “ you know that I am a man of honor.”

“ Yes,” said Monsoreau, “ you are a man of honor, as madame is a faithful wife.”

“ Well, monsieur,” said Bussy, slightly bending his head, “ this is severe, but it is deserved, and all will be settled at once. Only, as I have an engagement for to-morrow with four gentlemen whom you know, and their claim is prior to yours, I beg to be allowed to retire to-night, pledging my word that you will find me when and where you may wish.”

Monsoreau shrugged his shoulders.

“ Listen,” said Bussy. “ I swear before God, monsieur, that after I have satisfied MM. de Schomberg, D’Epernon, Quélus, and Maugiron, I shall be at your service. If they kill me, well, you will be paid by their hands ; if, on the contrary, I am in condition to pay my debts—”

Monsoreau turned to his men.

“ On, my brave fellows,” he said.

“ Ah ! ” said Bussy, “ I was mistaken. This is not a duel : it is an assassination.”

“ *Parbleu !* ” said Monsoreau.

“ Yes, I see. We had misunderstood each other. But consider, monsieur,—the Duc d’Anjou will take this very ill.”

“ He sent me,” said Monsoreau.

Bussy shuddered. Diane raised her hands to Heaven with a groan.

“ In that case,” said the young man, “ I must rely on Bussy alone. Stand well, my men.” In one second he had overturned the *prie-dieu*, drawn up a table, and thrown a chair upon the whole, thus improvising a kind of rampart between himself and his enemies. This movement had been so rapid that a bullet fired from the musket buried itself in the soft padding of the *prie-dieu*. Bussy also threw down a magnificent credence-table of the time of Francis I. and added it to his fortifications.

Diane was concealed behind this last rampart. She understood that she could aid Bussy only by her prayers, and she prayed. Bussy glanced at her, then at his assailants, then at his intrenchments.

"Come on, now," he said, "but take care. My sword is sharp."

The men, urged onward by Monsoreau, advanced, and one of them tried to seize the *prie-dieu* and draw it down; but before his hand had touched it, Bussy's sword, passing through a crack, had ripped open his arm from the elbow to the shoulder. The man uttered a cry and fell back. Bussy then heard rapid footsteps in the corridor, and thought he was caught between two fires. He rushed to the door to bolt it, but ere he could reach it, it was opened. The young man stepped backwards to be in a position of defence against his old and new enemies.

"Ah! dear master," said a well-known voice. "Are we in time?"

"Rémy!" cried the count.

"And I!" cried a second voice; "it seems they are trying to assassinate here."

Bussy recognized this voice, and made a joyful exclamation.

"Saint-Luc," he said.

"In person."

"Ah, ah!" said Bussy, "I think now, my dear M. de Monsoreau, that you would do well to let us pass. If you do not stand aside, we shall pass over you."

"Three more men!" cried Monsoreau, and three more heads appeared above the balcony.

"Ah, is it then an army?" asked Saint-Luc.

"Oh, God protect him!" prayed Diane.

"Wretch!" cried Monsoreau, and he advanced to strike her. Bussy saw the movement. Agile as a tiger, he bounded over his rampart. His sword met Monsoreau's, and he touched him on the throat; but the distance was too great. The wound was only a scratch.

Five or six men fell at once on Bussy. One of them fell beneath Saint-Luc's sword.

“ Forward ! ” cried Rémy.

“ No, not forward,” said Bussy ; “ carry away Diane.”

Monsoreau uttered a yell, and snatched a pistol from one of the new-comers. Rémy hesitated.

“ But you,” he said.

“ Away, away ! ” cried Bussy, “ I confide her to you ! ”

“ Come, madame,” said Rémy.

“ Never ! No, I shall never abandon him ! ”

Rémy picked her up in his arms.

“ Bussy ! ” cried Diane ; “ come to me,—help ! ”

The poor woman was wild ; she no longer distinguished her friends from her enemies. All that separated her from Bussy was fatal and mortal.

“ Go ! ” cried Bussy ; “ I shall join you.”

“ Yes,” shrieked Monsoreau, “ you will join her, I hope.”

Bussy saw Le Haudoin totter and fall, dragging Diane with him. He uttered a cry and turned.

“ It is nothing, master,” said Rémy ; “ I received the bullet ; she is safe.”

Three men threw themselves on Bussy. Just as he turned, Saint-Luc passed between Bussy and the three men. One of the three fell ; the other two stepped back.

“ Saint-Luc,” said Bussy, “ in the name of the woman you love, save Diane.”

“ But you ? ”

“ I am a man.”

Saint-Luc flew to Diane, who had already risen on her knees, picked her up in his arms, and disappeared through the door.

“ Here, my men, from the staircase,” shouted Monsoreau.

“ Ah, wretch ! ” cried Bussy ; “ ah, coward ! ”

Monsoreau retreated behind his men. Bussy gave a back stroke and a thrust ; with the first he cut open a head, and with the second he pierced a breast.

“ That makes room,” he said, as he took his place behind his rampart.

“ Fly, master, fly ! ” murmured Rémy.

"I, fly,—fly from assassins!" Then bending over the young man, "Diane must escape," he said; "but what is the matter with you?"

"Take care," said Rémy,—"take care!"

Four men had just come in through the door from the staircase. Bussy was taken between the two bands; but his only thought was for Diane; and without losing a second, he flew at these four men. They were taken unawares and two fell,—one wounded, and the other dead. Then, as Monsoreau advanced, he stepped back and found himself behind his rampart.

"Draw the bolts!" cried Monsoreau; "turn the key; we have him; we have him!"

During this time, Rémy, by a last effort, had dragged himself before Bussy, and added his body to the rampart. There was a pause. Bussy, with his legs bent, his body placed against the wall, and his sword pointed, threw a rapid glance around him.

Seven men were lying on the ground and nine remained standing. Bussy counted them with his eyes. But when he saw the nine swords gleaming; when he heard Monsoreau encourage his men, and felt the blood beneath his feet, this brave man, who had never known fear, saw the image of death rising from the depths of the chamber and summoning him with her wan smile.

"I may kill five of the nine," he said, "but the other four will kill me. I have strength to fight for ten more minutes; well, during these ten minutes I shall do what man has never done before."

Removing his cloak, which he wound round his left arm like a buckler, he bounded into the middle of the room, seeming to consider it unworthy of his fame to fight any longer under cover. There his sword slipped like a snake among the other swords. Three times he saw an opening and extended his arm; three times he felt the leather doublets yield, and three times he felt the warm blood flow on his hands. During this time he had parried twenty thrusts with his left arm. His cloak was in shreds.

The assassins changed their tactics when they saw three men fall. They gave up the sword, and some fell upon him with the butt-end of their muskets, while others fired their pistols which they had not yet used. He avoided the bullets by jumping from side to side or stooping. In that supreme hour his whole being seemed to multiply itself. He not only saw, heard, and acted, but he seemed to divine his enemies' most secret thoughts. Bussy was in one of those moments where the creature reaches the height of its perfection. He was less than a god because he was mortal, but he was more than a man.

He then thought that by killing Monsoreau he would put an end to the fight. He looked for him among the assassins ; but Monsoreau was behind his men, calmly loading the pistols or firing from his sheltered position. But it was an easy thing for Bussy to make an opening. He threw himself among the assailants and found himself face to face with Monsoreau. The latter, who held a loaded pistol, raised it and fired ; and the bullet, striking against the sword, broke the blade within six inches of the hilt.

“ Disarmed,” cried Monsoreau,—“ disarmed ! ”

Bussy stepped back, stooping as he did so to pick up his broken blade. In one instant he had tied it to his wrist with his handkerchief. The fight began again, presenting the prodigious spectacle of a man almost without weapons, but also almost without wounds, keeping six enemies at bay, and with ten corpses as a rampart. The struggle became more terrible than ever. While Monsoreau's men rushed against Bussy, Monsoreau, who guessed that the young man was seeking another weapon, drew to his side all those that were within reach. Bussy was surrounded. The blade of his sword was bent, twisted, and shook in his hand ; fatigue began to deaden his arm. He looked around, and suddenly one of the bodies rose to its knees and handed him a long, strong sword. This corpse was Rémy's, who performed a last act of devotion.

Bussy uttered a cry of joy and bounded back to free

his hand from his broken blade. In the mean time, Monsoreau approached Rémy and discharged his pistol at his head. Rémy fell with a shattered skull, this time to rise no more. Bussy roared.

His strength returned with the means of defence. He whirled his sword round in a circle, cutting off a wrist and opening a cheek. The way to the door was cleared by this double stroke. He rushed against it, and tried to force it open with an effort that shook the wall ; but the bolts resisted. Exhausted by the effort, Bussy let fall his right arm, and with the left he tried to draw the bolts behind him, while he faced his assailants.

During this second he received a bullet in the thigh and two wounds in his side. But he had drawn the bolts and turned the key. Sublime with rage, he repulsed the boldest of the ruffians, and rushing on Monsoreau wounded him in the chest. The master of the hounds uttered a curse.

“ Ah ! ” said Bussy, opening the door, “ I am beginning to think that I shall escape.”

The four men threw down their weapons and threw themselves on Bussy ; they could not touch him with the sword, for his marvellous skill made him invulnerable. They tried to smother him, but Bussy knocked them with the hilt of his sword, or slashed them, without mercy. Monsoreau twice approached the young man, and was wounded twice more. But the three men hung on the hilt of his sword, and snatched it from his hands. Bussy picked up a tripod of carved wood used as a footstool, and struck three blows ; two men fell, but the tripod broke on the shoulder of the last who remained standing. He buried his dagger in Bussy’s breast, but Bussy seized his wrist, drew out the dagger, and forced him to stab himself.

The last one jumped out of the window. Bussy advanced to follow him ; but Monsoreau, who was lying amongst the corpses, rose in turn and ripped open his leg with a knife. The young man uttered a cry, seized the nearest sword, and plunged it into the master of the hounds so vigorously that he nailed him to the ground.

"Ah," said Bussy, "I do not know if I shall live, but I shall at least have seen you die."

Monsoreau made an effort to answer, but his last sigh passed between his open lips. Bussy then dragged himself to the corridor. He was losing all his blood from his wound in the leg. He threw a last glance behind him. The moon had just come from beneath a cloud ; its light flooded this room inundated with blood, and illumined the walls pierced by bullets and hacked by blows, and lighted up the pale faces of the dead, most of whom preserved in death the fierce look of the assassin. Bussy, at the sight of this field of battle peopled by himself, felt a thrill of pride, wounded and dying though he was. As he had said, he had done what no man could have done. There now remained for him to fly and escape ; he could fly from the dead.

But all was not over for the unfortunate young man. When he reached the staircase, he saw weapons gleaming in the yard ; a shot was fired, and he received a bullet in his shoulder. The court was guarded. He then thought of the little window through which Diane had promised to watch the combat on the morrow, and he went to it as rapidly as he could. It was open and looked out upon a starlit sky. Bussy closed and locked the door behind him ; then with great difficulty he succeeded in mounting on the window, climbed over the railing, and measured with his eye the distance to the iron trellis, so as to jump on the other side.

"Oh, I shall never have the strength," he murmured ; but at that moment he heard footsteps on the stairs. It was the second troop coming up. Bussy was without means of defence. He summoned all his strength, and, leaning on the only arm and foot he could use, he made a spring. But as he sprang, the sole of his boot slipped on the stone, he had so much blood on his feet. He fell upon the iron trellis. Some of the sharp points entered his body, while others caught in his clothes, and he remained hanging. At that moment he thought of his only friend.

"Saint-Luc !" he cried, "help ! Saint-Luc ! "

"Ah, it is you, M. de Bussy," said a voice, coming from a clump of trees. Bussy started ; it was not the voice of Saint-Luc.

"Saint-Luc!" he cried again, "help! help! fear nothing for Diane ; I have killed Monsoreau."

"Ah, Monsoreau is killed?" said another voice.

"Yes."

"Very well."

Bussy saw two men come from beneath the trees ; both were masked.

"Gentlemen," said Bussy, "in the name of Heaven, help an unfortunate man who may yet escape if you aid him."

"What do you think, monseigneur?" asked one of the men in an undertone.

"Imprudent!" said the other.

"Monseigneur," cried Bussy, who had heard through the acuteness of his senses, "deliver me, and I will pardon you for betraying me."

"Do you hear?" asked the masked man.

"What do you order?"

"That you deliver him,"—then he added, with a laugh which his mask partially concealed,—"from his sufferings."

Bussy turned his head towards the man who laughed at such a moment.

"Oh, I am lost," he murmured. At the same moment the barrel of a gun was placed against his breast and a shot was fired. Bussy's head fell upon his shoulder and his hands stiffened. "Assassin!" he said, "be accursed." He died with Diane's name on his lips. The drops of his blood fell from the trellis upon the one whom he called Monseigneur.

"Is he dead?" cried several men who had broken open the door and appeared at the window.

"Yes," cried D'Aurilly, "but fly. Remember that Monseigneur the Duc d'Anjou was M. de Bussy's friend and protector."

The men asked no more questions and disappeared.

The duke heard the sound of their retreating footsteps.

“Now, D’Aurilly,” said the other masked man, “go up into that room and throw down Monsoreau’s body.” D’Aurilly went up, recognized the master of the hounds among the many corpses, took him up on his shoulders, and threw down the body, which fell at the duke’s feet, while the blood splashed on his clothes. François searched the dead man’s doublet and drew out the paper signed by his royal hand.

“This is all I wanted,” he said; “there is nothing more to be done here.”

“And Diane?” asked D’Aurilly, from the window.

“*Ma foi!* I no longer care for her, and as she has not recognized us, untie her and Saint-Luc and let them go where they please.”

D’Aurilly disappeared.

“I shall not be King of France this time,” said the duke, as he tore the paper to pieces; “but I escape being beheaded for high treason.”

CHAPTER XCIII.

HOW GORENFLOT FOUND HIMSELF MORE THAN EVER BETWEEN A GALLOWS AND AN ABBEY.

THE adventure of the conspiracy was a comedy to the very end; neither the Swiss placed at one end nor the French guards at the other had been able to lay hands on even the smallest conspirator. All had fled through the subterranean passage. They saw nothing come out of the abbey. So soon as the door was broken in, Crillon placed himself at the head of about thirty men, and with the king, invaded Sainte-Genevieve.

A deathlike silence reigned throughout the vast and gloomy buildings. Crillon, a man of experience, would have preferred a great noise; he feared some ambush.

But in vain did he send out scouts ; in vain did they open doors and windows, and search the crypt,—all was deserted.

The king was among the first, and went sword in hand, crying out, “ Chicot, Chicot ! ”

No one answered.

“ Have they killed him ? ” asked the king. “ *Mordieu !* they shall pay for my fool the price of a gentleman.”

“ You are right, sire,” replied Crillon, “ he was one, and of the bravest.”

Chicot did not reply because he was busy beating M. de Mayenne, and he found so much pleasure in this occupation that he neither saw nor heard what was going on around him. However, when the duke had disappeared, and Gorenfot had fainted, and nothing remained to occupy his attention, he heard and recognized the royal voice.

“ Here, my son, come this way,” he cried with all his strength while trying to make Gorenfot sit up. He succeeded and placed him against a tree.

The strength he was obliged to use in this charitable work took away from his voice a portion of its volume, so that Henri imagined it came to him with a lamentable tone. This was not the case. Chicot was, on the contrary, in the height of his triumph, only as he watched the monk’s pitiful condition he asked himself if he must run the traitor through or be merciful towards this voluminous hogshead.

He therefore looked at Gorenfot for a moment as Augustus must have looked at Cinna. Gorenfot was gradually coming to his senses, and stupid though he was, he understood the peril of his situation. Besides, he rather resembled those animals who are incessantly threatened by men, and who feel instinctively that no hand is ever raised but to beat them. These were his inner feelings when he opened his eyes.

“ Monsieur Chicot,” he cried.

“ Ah, ah,” said the Gascon, “ so you are not dead ? ”

" My good Monsieur Chicot," said the monk, trying to clasp his two hands over his enormous stomach, " is it possible that you will give me into the hands of my persecutors ? "

" Wretch ! " said Chicot, in a tone of ill-disguised tenderness.

Gorenflot began to howl. After having succeeded in joining his hands, he tried to wring them.

" I, who have made so many good dinners with you," he cried. " I who drank so neatly that you called me the king of sponges. I who was so fond of the capons you ordered at the Corne d'Abondance that I never left but the bones."

Chicot found this climax so sublime that he determined on clemency.

" Here they are, good God ! " cried Gorenflot, making an unsuccessful effort to rise,—" here they are ! they are coming. I am dead. Oh, good Monsieur Chicot, help me." And the monk, not being able to rise, threw himself face downwards. It was easier.

" Rise," said Chicot.

" Will you forgive me ? "

" We shall see."

" You have beaten me so much that it might count for something."

Chicot burst out laughing. The poor monk was so upset that he really imagined he had received all the blows distributed to Mayenne.

" You laugh, Monsieur Chicot," he said.

" Yes, of course I laugh, animal."

" Then I shall live ? "

" Perhaps."

" Well, you would not laugh if your Gorenflot were about to die."

" That does not depend upon me, but upon the king ; the king alone has the right of life and death."

Gorenflot made an attempt and succeeded in getting upon his knees. At this moment the scene was brightly illuminated, and the two friends were surrounded by a

number of men whose embroidered doublets and flaming swords glittered in the glare of the torches.

"Ah, Chicot, my dear Chicot," cried the king, "how glad I am to see you."

"You hear, Monsieur Chicot, that great prince is happy to see you."

"Well?"

"Well, in his happiness, he will not refuse to grant what you request; ask for my pardon."

"From Herod?"

"Oh, be silent, dear Monsieur Chicot."

"Well, sire," said Chicot, turning to the king, "how many have you?"

"*Confiteor*," said Gorenflot.

"Not one," replied Crillon. "The traitors must have found some opening unknown to us."

"That is probable," said Chicot.

"But you saw them?" asked the king.

"Certainly, I saw them."

"All?"

"From the first to the last."

"*Confiteor*," repeated Gorenflot, who could get no further.

"You no doubt recognized them?"

"No, sire."

"What! you did not recognize them?"

"That is to say, I only recognized one; and yet—"

"And yet?"

"It was not his face."

"Which one did you recognize?"

"M. de Mayenne."

"M. de Mayenne!—the one to whom you owed?"

"Exactly. We are quits, sire."

"Ah! tell me about it, Chicot."

"Later, my son, later; let us attend to the present."

"Ah, you have made a prisoner!" suddenly said Crillon, laying his hand on Gorenflot, who bent beneath the weight.

The monk began to speak, and Chicot took his time to

reply, allowing all the anguish of fright to dwell within the heart of the unhappy man.

Gorenflot came very near fainting a second time when he felt all this anger seething around him. Finally, after a moment's silence, during which Gorenflot fancied he heard the trumpet of the last judgment blowing in his ears,—

“Sire,” said Chicot, “look well at this monk.”

One of the men raised a torch to Gorenflot's face. He closed his eyes to make easier the passage from one world to another.

“The preacher Gorenflot!” cried Henri.

“*Confiteor, confiteor, confiteor!*” quickly said the monk.

“In person,” said Chicot.

“The one who—”

“Exactly,” interrupted the Gascon.

“Ah, ah!” said the king, in a tone of satisfaction. The perspiration from Gorenflot's face might have filled a bucket, and with good cause, for the swords clashed in a most threatening manner; some even came dangerously near. Gorenflot felt them rather than saw them, and uttered a feeble cry.

“Wait,” said Chicot, “the king must know all;” and taking Henri aside,—

“My son,” he whispered to him, “thank God for having permitted this holy man to come into the world some thirty-five years ago, because he is the one who saved us all.”

“How so?”

“Yes; he told me the whole plot from beginning to end.”

“When?”

“About a week ago; so if ever your Majesty's enemies were to find him, he would be a dead man.”

Gorenflot heard only the last words.

“A dead man!” and he fell on both hands.

“Worthy man!” said the king, throwing a kindly glance on that mass of flesh which, in the eyes of every

sensible man, represented a mass of matter capable of absorbing and extinguishing every ray of intelligence, "we shall cover him with our protection."

Gorenflot caught this merciful glance in its flight, and like an ancient mask, smiled on one side while he wept on the other.

"And you will do wisely, my king," said Chicot; "for he is a most wonderful servant."

"What do you think I ought to do with him?" asked the king.

"I think he will be in great danger so long as he remains in Paris."

"If I were to give him guards?" said the king.

Gorenflot heard Henri make this proposition.

"Well," he said, "it seems I shall get off with imprisonment. I prefer that to beating, if they only feed me well."

"Not at all," said Chicot; "it will be needless if you allow me to take him with me."

"Where?"

"Home."

"Well, take him and return to the Louvre, where I shall join my friends and prepare them for to-morrow."

"Rise, reverend father," said Chicot to the monk.

"He is jesting," murmured Gorenflot.

"Get up, you brute!" whispered the Gascon, giving him a kick.

"Ah, I deserved that!" cried Gorenflot.

"What is he saying?" asked the king.

"Sire," replied Chicot, "he enumerates all his fatigues, he recalls his tortures, and when I promise him your Majesty's protection, strong in the consciousness of his merits, he says, 'I deserved that!'"

"Poor devil!" said the king, "well, take good care of him."

"Ah, be not uneasy, sire; when he is with me he lacks nothing."

"Ah, Monsieur Chicot," cried Gorenflot, "whither are you taking me?"

" You shall soon know. In the mean time, thank his Majesty, you monster of iniquities ! "

" What for ? "

" Thank him, I tell you ! "

" Sire," stammered Gorenflot, " since your gracious Majesty— "

" Yes," said Henri, " I know all that you did during your journey to Lyons, during the evening of the League, and finally to-day. Receive the assurance that you shall be rewarded according to your merits."

Gorenflot breathed a sigh.

" Where is Panurge ? " asked Chicot.

" In the stable, poor animal."

" Well, go and get him, mount him, and meet me here."

" Yes, Monsieur Chicot."

The monk went quickly away, very much surprised that the guards did not follow him.

" Now, my son," said Chicot, " keep twenty men for your escort, and detach ten others with M. de Crillon."

" Where shall I send them ? "

" To the Hôtel d'Anjou, and let them bring your brother."

" What for ? "

" That he may not escape a second time."

" Did my brother— ? "

" Do you repent of having followed my advice to-day ? "

" No, *par la mordieu !*"

" Well, do as I tell you."

Henri ordered the colonel of the French guards to bring the Duc d'Anjou to the Louvre. Crillon, who had no feeling of tenderness for the prince, set out at once.

" And you ? " said Henri.

" I am waiting for my saint."

" And you will join me at the Louvre ? "

" Within one hour."

" Then I shall leave you."

" Go, my son ! "

Henri set out with the rest of the troop. As for Chicot, he went towards the stable, and as he entered the yard he

saw Gorenflot appear, mounted on Panurge. The poor fellow had not even thought of avoiding his impending fate.

"Come, come," said Chicot, leading Panurge by the halter ; "we must hasten, for we are expected."

Gorenflot did not make a shadow of resistance, only he shed so many tears that he seemed to grow visibly thinner.

"When I said so," he murmured,— "when I said so!"

Chicot continued to lead Panurge, and shrugged his shoulders.

CHAPTER XCIV.

WHERE CHICOT GUESSES WHY D'EPERNON HAD BLOOD ON HIS FEET, AND NONE IN HIS CHEEKS.

WHEN the king returned to the Louvre, he found his friends in bed and sleeping peacefully. Historical events have a singular influence, which consists in reflecting their greatness on preceding ones. Those who will consider the occurrences which were to take place that morning, for the king returned to the Louvre at about two o'clock,—those who will consider these occurrences with a knowledge of future results, will take some interest in seeing the king, who had just saved his crown, take refuge near his three friends who, in a few hours, were to risk their lives for him.

The poet who does not foresee, but who guesses, will find great charm in these young faces refreshed by sleep and smiling confidently as they lie in their beds placed side by side, like brothers in the paternal dormitory.

Henri advanced cautiously among them, followed by Chicot, who, having deposited his patient in a place of safety, had joined the king. One bed was empty : it was D'Epervon's.

"Not yet come in, the imprudent," murmured the king ; "ah, the wretch, the fool ! having to fight tomorrow with Bussy, the bravest man in France, the most dangerous in the world, and think no more of it than that!"

"Yes, very true," said Chicot.

"Send for him, bring him here," cried the king. "Then go for Miron; I wish him to make that madman sleep in spite of himself. I wish sleep to make him strong and vigorous, able to defend himself."

"Sire," said the usher, "here is M. D'Epernon who is just now returning."

D'Epernon had, in fact, just come in. Hearing of the king's return, and expecting his visit to the dormitory, he hoped to glide in unperceived. But his arrival was watched and immediately announced to the king. Finding there was no way to escape the scolding, he appeared on the threshold very much confused.

"Ah, here you are at last," said Henri; "come and look at your friends."

D'Epernon glanced around the room and made a sign intimating that he had seen.

"Look at your friends," continued Henri; "they are wise and understand the importance of the game they are to play to-morrow; but you wretch, instead of praying and sleeping like them, you have been running about the town. *Corbleu!* how pale you are, and what a good showing you will make to-morrow if you are already used up to-night!"

D'Epernon was indeed very pale,—so pale that at the king's remark he colored.

"Come," said Henri, "go to bed and sleep if you can!"

"Why not?" asked D'Epernon, and judging from his tone, he seemed to consider the question an insult.

"I ask you if you will have time to sleep. Do you know that you are to fight at daybreak, and at this time of the year the sun rises at four o'clock? It is now two; you have barely two hours."

"Two hours well employed can go a long way."

"Will you sleep?"

"Perfectly, sire."

"I do not think so."

"Why not?"

"Because you are agitated. You think of to-morrow. Alas! you are right, for to-morrow is to-day; but in

spite of myself, I have a secret desire to say that we have not yet reached the fatal day."

"Sire," said D'Epernon, "I promise you I shall sleep, if your Majesty will only let me."

"That is just," said Chicot.

In the meantime, D'Epernon undressed himself and got into bed with a calm satisfaction that seemed to auger well both to the king and Chicot.

"He is brave as Julius Cæsar," said the king.

"So brave," said Chicot, scratching his ear, "that, on my honor, I cannot understand it."

"See, he is already asleep."

Chicot approached the bed, doubting that D'Epernon's coolness could go so far.

"Oh, oh," he suddenly exclaimed.

"What is it?" asked the king.

"Look," and Chicot pointed to D'Epernon's boots.

"Blood!" murmured the king.

"He has been walking in blood, my son. The brave fellow."

"Can he be wounded?" asked the king, anxiously.

"Pshaw! he would have told you; and unless he has been wounded like Achilles, in the heel—"

"His doublet is also stained; and look at his sleeve. What has happened?"

"He may have killed some one," said Chicot.

"What for?"

"To keep his hand in."

"This is singular," said the king.

Chicot scratched his ear much more seriously.

"Hum, hum!" he said.

"You do not answer me."

"Yes; I said, 'Hum, hum!' That means a great deal, I think."

"*Mon Dieu!*" said Henri, "what is going on around me, and what has the future in store? Luckily to-morrow—"

"To-day, my son, you always forget."

"Yes, that is true."

"Well, to-day?"

"To-day I shall be tranquil."

“ Why so ? ”

“ Because they will kill those cursed Angevins.”

“ You think so, Henri ? ”

“ I am sure of it ; they are brave.”

“ I never heard that the Angevins were cowards.”

“ No doubt ; but see how strong they are ; see Schomberg’s arms and their beautiful muscles.”

“ Ah, if you saw Antraguet’s.”

“ Look at Quélus’ proud lip and Maugiron’s brow, haughty even in his sleep. With such faces, victory is certain. Ah ! when those eyes flash the enemy is already half conquered.”

“ Dear friend,” said Chicot, sadly shaking his head, “ there are other brows as haughty and other eyes as bright. Is that all that reassures you ? ”

“ No, come and let me show you something.”

“ Where ? ”

“ In my room.”

“ Is it this thing that makes you confident of victory ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ Then come.”

“ Wait.” Henri went towards the young men. “ Listen,” he said, “ I do not wish to agitate them to-morrow, or rather to-day, so I shall take leave of them at once.”

Chicot shook his head. “ Take leave, my son,” he said.

The tone in which he uttered these words was so melancholy that the king felt a shudder through his frame, and tears came into his eyes.

“ Farewell, my friends,” he murmured,—“ farewell, my dear friends.”

Chicot turned away ; his heart was not of stone any more than the king’s, but in spite of himself, his eyes soon reverted to the young men. Henri leaned over them and kissed them on the forehead, one after another. A pale pink taper shed its light over this scene, and gave a funereal tint to the draperies of the room and to the faces of the sleepers.

Chicot was not superstitious ; but when he saw Henri

touch with his lips the brows of Maugiron, Quélus, and Schomberg, his imagination pictured a living man bidding a last farewell to the dead already lying in their graves.

"It is singular," he said, "I never felt so before. Poor children."

No sooner had the king finished embracing his friends than D'Epernon opened his eyes to see if he were really gone. He had just left the room leaning on Chicot's arm.

D'Epernon jumped out of bed, and began to efface as well as he could the bloodstains on his clothes and boots. This occupation caused his mind to revert to the scene near the Bastille.

"I never would have had enough blood for that man who has shed so much unaided," he murmured, as he returned to his bed.

As for Henri, he conducted Chicot to his room, and opened a long ebony coffer lined with white satin.

"Look," he said.

"Swords. Well, what of that?"

"Yes, but blessed swords, my friend."

"By whom?"

"By our Holy Father the Pope, who granted me this favor. Such as you see it, to send this box to Rome and get it back cost me twenty horses and four men; but I have the swords."

"Are they sharp?"

"No doubt; but their principal merit is that they have been blessed."

"Yes, I know; but I should like to be sure that they are sharp."

"Pagan!"

"Let us talk of something else."

"Very well, but make haste."

"Do you want to sleep?"

"No, I want to pray."

"In that case, let us talk business. Have you sent for M. d'Anjou?"

"Yes, he is waiting below."

"What do you intend to do with him?"

“ Throw him into the Bastille.”

“ That is very wise. Only choose a safe and deep dungeon, the one for instance which was occupied by the Constable de Saint-Pol or Jacques d’Armagnac.”

“ Oh, have no uneasiness.”

“ I know where you can buy fine black velvet, my son.”

“ Chicot, he is my brother.”

“ Exactly, and court mourning is purple. Will you speak to him?”

“ Yes, if only to show him that all his plots are discovered.”

“ Hum ! ” said Chicot.

“ Do you disapprove of my having an interview with him ? ”

“ No, but in your place I would cut short the conversation, and double the imprisonment.”

“ Let them bring here the Duc d’Anjou,” said Henri.

“ No matter,” said Chicot, “ I still maintain my first opinion.”

The duke entered a moment later ; he was very pale and disarmed. Crillon followed, holding his sword in his hand.

“ Where did you find him ? ” asked the king, speaking to Crillon as if the duke had not been there.

“ Sire, his Highness was not at home ; but soon after I had taken possession of the *hôtel* in the king’s name, his Highness returned, and we arrested him without resistance.”

“ That is fortunate,” said the king, disdainfully ; then turning to the prince,—

“ Where were you, monsieur ? ” he asked.

“ Wherever I was, your Majesty may be assured that I was attending to his business,” replied the duke.

“ I have no doubt of it,” replied the king, “ and your answer proves that I was quite right to do the same.”

François made a respectful bow.

“ Come, where were you ? ” asked the king, advancing toward his brother. “ And what were you doing while your accomplices were being arrested ? ”

“ My accomplices ? ” asked François.

“ Yes, your accomplices,” repeated the king.

"Sire, your Majesty is surely under an erroneous impression."

"Oh, this time you shall not escape, monsieur, and your criminal career is terminated. This time again, you shall not inherit from me."

"Sire, moderate yourself. There is surely some one who blackens my character to you."

"Wretch!" cried Henri, in a rage, "you shall die of hunger in the darkest dungeon of the Bastille."

"I await your orders, sire, and I bless them though you may order my death."

"But where were you, hypocrite?"

"Sire, I was saving your Majesty and working for the peace and glory of your reign."

"Oh," said the king, petrified with amazement, "upon my honor, your audacity is great."

"Bah!" said Chicot, leaning back, "tell us about it, prince; it must be curious."

"Sire, I would tell your Majesty at once had you treated me as a brother, but as you have treated me as a criminal, I shall let the event speak for me."

Having spoken these words, he bowed even more deeply than the first time; then turning to Crillon and the other officers who were present,—

"Now which of you gentlemen will conduct the first prince of the blood to the Bastille?" he said.

Chicot reflected, and a flash shot through his mind.

"Ah, ah," he murmured, "I think I can understand why M. D'Epernon had so much blood on his feet and so little in his cheeks."

CHAPTER XCV.

THE MORNING OF THE COMBAT.

A BEAUTIFUL day rose over Paris; none of the *bourgeois* knew of the approaching event, but the royalist gentlemen and those of the Guise party, the latter still stupefied, awaited the result, and took cautious means to compliment the victors.

As we have seen in the last chapter, the king spent a sleepless night. He wept and prayed ; but as he was after all a man of experience, particularly in all matters of duelling, at about three o'clock in the morning he set out, accompanied by Chicot, to do the only thing he could for his friends. He went to examine the ground where the combat was to take place. This was a very remarkable scene, but we must also add, very little remarked.

Dressed in clothes of a dark color, enveloped in a large cloak, his sword by his side, his hair and eyes hidden beneath the rim of his hat, he followed the Rue Saint-Antoine to within three hundred feet of the Bastille. Having reached that point, he saw a large concourse of people a little beyond the Rue Saint Paul, and not wishing to go through this crowd, he turned into the Rue Sainte-Catherine, and reached the inclosure of the Tournelles from the other side.

It may be easily guessed what that crowd was doing there : they were counting the dead. The king avoided it, and consequently remained in ignorance of what had taken place.

Chicot, who had witnessed the quarrel or rather the agreement of the preceding week, explained to the king the position of each combatant, and the conditions of the combat. Henri, being thus informed, began immediately to measure the ground, looking at the trees and calculating the reflection of the sun.

“ Quélus will be very much exposed ; he will have the sun on his right, just in his only eye,¹ whereas Maugiron will have all the shade. Quélus should have taken Maugiron’s place and Maugiron, who has excellent eyes, that of Quélus. This is very badly managed. As for Schomberg, who has weak legs, he will have a tree to rest against. I am somewhat reassured for him, but Quélus, my poor Quélus !”

And he sadly shook his head.

“ You grieve me, my king,” said Chicot. “ Come, do not torment yourself thus. The devil ! they will get what they can.”

¹ Quelus had lost his left eye in a former duel.

The king raised his eyes to Heaven and smiled.

"*Mon Dieu!* see how he blasphemers ; but luckily, you know he is but a fool."

Chicot shrugged his shoulders.

"And D'Epernon," continued the king, "I am unjust. I did not even think of him ; D'Epernon who is to fight with Bussy ; how he will be exposed ! See the ground, Chicot, to the left, a fence ; to the right, a tree ; behind, a ditch. And he will have to move constantly, for Bussy is a tiger, a lion, a serpent. Bussy is a living sword which bounds, advances, and retreats."

"Pshaw !" said Chicot, "I am not uneasy about D'Epernon."

"You are wrong ; he will be killed."

"He is not such a fool ; be sure he has taken precautions."

"What do you mean ?"

"I mean that he will not fight, *mordieu !*"

"Come, did you not hear him just now ?"

"Exactly."

"Well ?"

"Well, that is why I repeat that he will not fight."

"Incredulous and sceptical man."

"I know my Gascon, Henri ; but believe me, let us return to the Louvre ; it is now broad daylight."

"Do you believe I shall remain at the Louvre during the fight ?"

"*Ventre de biche !* you shall remain there ; for if you should be seen here, every one would say in case your friends were victorious, that you had forced the victory by the use of magic ; and in case they were conquered, that you brought them misfortune."

"What do I care for rumors and interpretations. I shall love them to the very end."

"You may have a strong mind, Henri, and I even pay you the compliment to say that you love your friends ; this is a rare virtue in a prince, but I do not wish you to leave M. d'Anjou alone in the Louvre."

"Is not Crillon there ?"

" Eh ! Crillon is only a buffalo, a rhinoceros, a boar, all that is brave and resolute, whereas your brother is a viper, a rattlesnake, any animal whose power resides less in its strength than in its venom."

" You are right. I should have had him thrown into the Bastille."

" I told you it was unwise to see him."

" Yes. I was conquered by his coolness, his audacity, and by the service he pretends to have rendered me."

" All the more reason for you to beware of him. Believe me, my son, let us go in."

Henri followed Chicot's advice and took his way to the Louvre, after having thrown a last glance at the field of combat.

Every one was up in the Louvre when the king and Chicot returned. The young men were among the first to wake up, and were being dressed by their lackeys. Henri asked what they were doing. Schomberg was bending his knees, Quélus was bathing his eye, Maugiron was drinking a glass of Spanish wine, and D'Epernon was sharpening his sword. He could be seen doing this work as he had had a stone carried up to their room.

" And you say he is not a Bayard ? " asked Henri, giving him a loving glance.

" No ; I say he is only a knife-grinder."

D'Epernon saw him and cried out, " The king."

And in spite of the resolution he had taken, and which under the circumstances he had not the strength to keep, Henri entered the room. We have already said that he was a very majestic king, and that he had great powers of self-control. His tranquil and almost smiling countenance betrayed none of the feelings of his heart.

" Good morning, gentlemen," he said. " I find you in excellent condition, it seems to me."

" Yes, thank Heaven," replied Quelus.

" You look gloomy, Maugiron."

" Sire, I am very superstitious, as your Majesty knows. I have had bad dreams, so I am drinking a little wine to keep up my spirits."

" My friend," said the king, " you must remember,—I am quoting Miron, who is, as you know, a great doctor,—you must remember that dreams depend upon past impressions, but never influence coming actions, save with the will of God."

" Therefore, sire, you see me prepared," said D'Epernon. " I too had bad dreams last night. Nevertheless, my hand is firm and my eyes are bright." And he proved his words by making a lunge with his newly sharpened sword.

" Yes," said Chicot, " you dreamed that you had blood on your shoes ; that dream is not a bad one. It means that some day you will be a great conqueror like Cæsar or Alexander."

" My friends," said Henri, " you know that you are defending my honor, but only my honor. Do not trouble yourselves about the safety of my person. Last night I settled my throne in such a manner that it will not be shaken again for some time. Therefore, fight for honor."

" Have no uneasiness, sire," said Quélus, " we may lose our lives, but our honor will be safe."

" Gentlemen," said the king, " I love you tenderly, and I also esteem you. Let me give you some advice. No false courage. You will aid my cause, not by dying, but by killing my enemies."

" Oh, as for me," said D'Epernon, " I shall give no quarter."

" I," said Quélus, " will promise nothing. I shall do what I can."

" And I," said Maugiron, " I assure your Majesty that if I am killed, I shall also kill my adversary, blow for blow."

" Do you fight with the sword alone ? "

" With the sword and dagger," replied Schomberg.

The king had one hand on his breast. It may be that that hand and heart communicated their fears through their pulsations ; but outwardly he was the king sending his soldiers to fight, and not his friends to their death.

" Really, my king," said Chicot, " you are truly magnificent at this moment."

The gentlemen were ready, and it only remained for them to take leave of their master.

"Are you going on horseback?" asked Henri.

"No, sire, we shall walk," said Quélus. "Exercise is a good thing for the head, and your Majesty has told us a thousand times, that the head, rather than the arm, directs the sword."

"You are right," said the king. "Give me your hand."

Quélus bent over and kissed the king's hand, and the others followed his example. D'Epernon knelt down and said,—

"Sire, bless my sword."

"No, D'Epernon," said Henri, "give that sword to your page. I have better ones than those. Bring them, Chicot."

"No," said the Gascon, "give that task to your captain of the guards, my son. I am but a Pagan, and the blessings of Heaven might change to fatal spells, if my friend, the devil, happened to see what I was carrying."

"What are these swords, sire?" asked Schomberg, glancing at the box which the officer had just carried in.

"Italian swords made in Milan. The hilts are good as you see; as with the exception of Schomberg, you all have delicate hands, and the first stroke would disarm you if you had not a good hold."

"Thank you, sire," unanimously exclaimed the four young men.

"It is time for you to go," said the king, who could no longer control his emotions.

"Sire," asked Quélus, "shall we not have your Majesty's presence to encourage us?"

"No, that would not be right. You will fight without any one's knowing it, without my permission. Let us give no solemnity to the combat. Let it seem to be the result of a private quarrel."

And he dismissed them with a truly majestic gesture. When they had left his presence, when the last of the valets had crossed the threshold of the Louvre, when the

jingling of their spurs had died away, the king flung himself down, and exclaimed, " Ah, I am dying ! "

" And I wish to see that duel," said Chicot. " I do not know why, but I have an idea that something curious will happen about D'Epernon."

" You leave me, Chicot ? " asked the king in a doleful voice.

" Yes," said Chicot, " for if one of them failed in his duty, I would be there to take his place, and sustain the honor of my king."

" Go," said Henri.

The Gascon had no sooner taken leave, than he was off like a flash. The king then retired to his room, closed the shutters, forbade any one to utter a word in the Louvre, and only said to Crillon, who knew what was about to take place,—

" If we are victorious, Crillon, you will tell me; if, on the contrary, we are defeated, knock three times."

" Yes, sire," replied Crillon, shaking his head.

CHAPTER XCVI.

BUSSY'S FRIENDS.

IF the king's friends had spent the night sleeping quietly, those of the Duc d'Anjou had taken the same precaution. After a good supper, to which they had invited one another without the advice or presence of their patron, who did not trouble himself about his favorites, they lay down in comfortable beds in Antraguet's house, which had been chosen as the one nearest to the field of battle. Ribeirac's squire, who was a great hunter and armorer, had spent the day cleaning, polishing, and sharpening the weapons. He was also to wake up the young men,—a duty which he always fulfilled on fête days or when they were to go hunting or fighting.

Before supper, Antraguet had gone to visit a little shop-girl, of the Rue Saint-Denis, whom he adored. Ribeirac

had written to his mother, and Livarot had made his will. At three o'clock, when the king's friends were scarcely awake, they were already up, all armed and ready.

They wore red breeches and stockings that their enemies might not see their blood, and that they themselves might not be frightened at the sight. They wore doublets of gray silk, so that nothing might impede their movements if they fought all dressed. Finally, they wore shoes without heels, and their pages carried their swords in order that their shoulders and arms might feel no fatigue.

The weather was splendid for love, war, or walking. The sun gilded the gables on which sparkled the morning dew. A delightful and penetrating perfume rose from the adjoining gardens. The pavement was dry, and the air delightful. Before leaving the house, the young men had sent to the Duc d'Anjou for news of Bussy. They were told that he had gone out the night before at about ten o'clock, and had not yet returned. He had gone out with Rémy, and both had taken their swords.

There was no uneasiness felt concerning him. He frequently made similar absences ; then he was known to be so strong, so skilful, and so brave that even a prolonged absence caused but little anxiety. The three friends listened to all these details.

"Well," said Antraguet, "did you not hear, gentlemen, that the king had commanded a grand chase in the forest of Compiègne, and that M. de Monsoreau must have set out yesterday?"

"Yes," replied the young men.

"Then I know where he is while the master of the hounds is stalking deer : he is hunting on Monsoreau's preserves. It is all right, gentlemen ; you may be sure that he will precede us on the ground, as he is nearer than we."

"Yes," said Livarot, "but fatigued, harassed after a sleepless night."

Antraguet shrugged his shoulders.

"Does Bussy ever get tired ?" he asked. "Come, gentlemen, let us be off ; we shall call for him on the way."

They started. This was the moment when Henri distributed the swords to his friends ; they had an advance of about ten minutes. As Antraguet lived near Saint Eustache, they took the Rue des Lombards, the Rue de la Verrerie, and finally, the Rue Saint-Antoine.

All these streets were deserted. The peasants coming from Montreuil, Vincennes, or Saint-Maur-les-Fossés with their milk and vegetables were alone permitted to see the three brave men with their three pages and three squires.

No more bravadoes, no more cries, no more threats ; a mortal duel without mercy or quarter gives food for thought ; and the most heedless of the three was that morning the most absorbed. On coming to the Rue Sainte-Catherine, all three glanced towards Monsoreau's little house with a smile that meant the same thought.

"One can have a good view from there," said Antraguet, "and I am sure that poor Diane will go more than once to the window."

"Look," said Ribeirac, "it seems that she has already been there."

"Why so?"

"It is open."

"Very true. But why is that ladder placed against the balcony when the house has doors ?"

"That is very queer," said Antraguet.

They approached the house with the presentiment that they were on the brink of some serious discovery.

"We are not the only ones to be surprised," said Livarot ; "see, those peasants stand up in their carts to get a better view!"

The young men now stood in front of the house. A man was already there and seemed to examine the ground.

"Eh ! M. de Monsoreau," cried Antraguet, "will you come and see us ? In that case, make haste, for we wish to be the first on the field."

They waited in vain.

"No one answers," said Ribeirac, "but why the devil is this ladder here ?"

“ What are you doing there ? ” asked Livarot of the man.
“ Did you put up that ladder ? ”
“ God forbid, gentlemen,” he answered.
“ Why so ? ” asked Antraguet.
“ Look up there.”

All three raised their heads.

“ Blood ! ” cried Ribeirac.

“ Yes, blood,” said the peasant, “ and very black blood.”

“ The door has been broken open,” said Antraguet’s page at the same moment.

Antraguet glanced from the door to the window, and, seizing the ladder, reached the balcony in one second. He looked into the room.

“ What is the matter ? ” asked the others, who saw him totter and turn pale.

A terrible cry was his only answer. Livarot had climbed up behind him.

“ Corpses ! death everywhere ! ” cried the young man, and both entered the room. Ribeirac remained below to guard against a surprise. During this time, the peasant’s exclamations caused all the passers-by to stop. The room showed everywhere the traces of the horrible struggle of the night. Stains or rather a river of blood covered the floor. The hangings were slashed with the swords or riddled by bullets. The furniture lay around, shattered and red, in the débris of flesh and garments.

“ Oh, Rémy ! poor Rémy ! ” suddenly cried Antraguet.

“ Dead ? ” asked Livarot.

“ Already cold.”

“ But a regiment of troopers must have passed through this room,” cried Livarot. At this moment he saw the door leading into the corridor wide open. Tracks of blood indicated that the struggle had also taken place there ; he followed the terrible vestiges and reached the staircase. The court was solitary and deserted. During this time Antraguet, instead of following him, went into the next room. There was blood everywhere ; the blood led to the window. He leaned out and looked into the little garden. The iron spikes still held the stiff and livid

corpse of the unfortunate Bussy. At this sight it was not a cry but a roar that Antraguet uttered. Livarot ran to him.

"Look!" said Antraguet, "Bussy dead!"

"Bussy assassinated, and thrown out of the window! Come in, Ribeirac, come in!"

In the meantime, Livarot rushed down into the court, met Ribeirac, and took him with him. A little door led from the court to the garden.

"It is really he," cried Livarot.

"His wrist is cut," said Ribeirac.

"He has two bullets in his breast."

"He is full of dagger wounds."

"Ah! poor Bussy," yelled Antraguet. "Vengeance! vengeance!"

As Livarot turned round he stumbled against another corpse.

"Monsoreau," he cried.

"What! Monsoreau, too?"

"Yes, Monsoreau shot through and through, and with his head broken on the pavement."

"Ah! they have assassinated all our friends to-night."

"And his wife, his wife," cried Antraguet, "Diane, Madame Diane!"

No one replied except the crowd which was beginning to gather around the house. This was the moment when the king and Chicot reached the Rue Sainte-Catherine and turned aside to avoid the people.

"Bussy! poor Bussy!" cried Ribeirac in despair.

"Yes," said Antraguet, "they wished to get rid of the most terrible of us all."

"This is cowardice! this is infamy," cried the other two young men.

"Let us complain to the duke," cried one of them.

"No," said Antraguet, "let us leave to none the task of avenging him; we would be but poorly avenged. Wait for me." In one second he had come down and joined Livarot and Ribeirac.

"Friends," he said, "see that noble face of the bravest of men. See the crimson drops of his blood; he sets us

an example ; he left to none the care of avenging him. Bussy, Bussy ! we shall do as you did and be sure that we shall avenge you."

As he spoke these words, he removed his hat, touched Bussy's lips with his own, and drawing his sword dipped it in his blood.

" Bussy," he said, " I swear on your body that this blood will be washed in that of your enemies ! "

" Bussy," said the others, " we swear to kill or die."

" Gentlemen," said Antraguet, sheathing his sword, " we shall show neither pity nor mercy."

" Neither pity nor mercy," they repeated as they extended their hands towards the corpse.

" But," said Livarot, " we are now only three against four."

" Yes, but we have assassinated no one," said Antraguet, " and God will give strength to the innocent. Adieu, Bussy."

" Adieu, Bussy ! " repeated the other two companions, and they went, pale and horror-stricken from that cursed house. They had found there, with the image of death, that profound despair which multiplies strength ; they had been inspired by that generous indignation which makes man superior to his mortal state.

They made their way through with difficulty, so great had the crowd increased during a quarter of an hour. On reaching the ground, they found their antagonists waiting for them, some seated on stones, the others picturesquely leaning against the wooden fences. They ran part of the way, ashamed of being the last ones. The four favorites were accompanied by four squires. Their four swords, lying on the ground, seemed to wait and rest like them.

" Gentlemen," said Quélus, rising and bowing with a sort of disdainful pride, " we have had the honor of waiting for you."

" Excuse us, gentlemen," said Antraguet, " we would have been here before had we not been delayed by one of our companions."

" M de Bussy ? " asked D'Epernon. " I do not see him. He does not seem very eager this morning."

"We have waited so long that we might wait a little longer," said Schomberg.

"M. de Bussy will not come," said Antraguet.

Amazement was written on every face, save that of D'Epernon which expressed a different feeling.

"Ah, ah ! he will not come," said he. "Is the brave of braves then afraid ?"

"That cannot be the reason," said Quélus.

"You are right, monsieur," said Livarot.

"And why will he not come ?" asked Maugiron.

"Because he is dead," replied Antraguet.

"Dead !" cried the favorites.

D'Epernon said nothing and even turned slightly pale.

"He died, assassinated !" continued Antraguet.

"Did you not know it, gentlemen ?"

"No," said Quélus, "and why should we know it ?"

"Besides, is it certain ?" asked D'Epernon.

Antraguet drew his sword.

"So certain," he said, "that here is his blood on my sword."

"Assassinated !" cried the king's three friends, "M. de Bussy assassinated !"

D'Epernon continued to shake his head with an air of doubt.

"This blood cries for vengeance," said Ribeirac, "do you not hear, gentlemen ?"

"Ah !" said Schomberg, "your words seem to have a meaning."

"*Pardieu !*" said Antraguet.

"What is it ?" cried Quélus.

"Seek who will profit by the crime," murmured Livarot.

"Ah ! gentlemen, will you speak more clearly ?" asked Maugiron, in a thundering voice.

"We have come for that, gentlemen," said Ribeirac, "and we have more reasons than we need to kill you a hundred times."

"Then draw your swords and be quick," said D'Epernon, brandishing his own.

"Oh ! you are in a great hurry, M. le Gascon," said

Livarot ; " you did not crow so loud when we were four against four."

" Is it our fault if you are only three ? " replied D'Epernon.

" Yes, it is your fault," cried Antraguet. " He is dead because you would rather see him lying in his grave than standing here ; he is dead with his wrist cut that that wrist might no longer hold a sword ; he is dead, that you might not be frightened by the lightning flashing from those eyes. Do you understand me ? Am I clear ? "

Schomberg, Maugiron, and D'Epernon howled with anger.

" Enough, gentlemen," said Quélus. " Withdraw, M. d'Epernon ; we shall fight three against three ; these gentlemen will see that in spite of our right to do so, we are not the men to profit by a misfortune which we regret as much as they do. Come, gentlemen," added the young man, throwing off his hat and raising his left hand while he whirled his sword with the other, " when you see us fight beneath God's open heaven, you can judge if we are assassins."

" Ah ! I hated you," said Schomberg, " and now I execrate you."

" And I," said Antraguet, " an hour ago would have killed you, but now I would tear you to pieces. On your guard, gentlemen."

" With or without doublets ? " asked Schomberg.

" Without doublets, without shirts," said Antraguet, " with bare breast and uncovered hearts."

The young men threw off their doublets and shirts.

" I have lost my dagger," said Quélus. " It was loose in the sheath, and must have fallen on the way."

" Or you left it at M. de Monsoreau's and did not dare draw it from its bloody sheath," said Antraguet.

Quélus yelled with rage and drew his sword.

" But he has no dagger, Monsieur Antraguet," cried Chicot, who had just reached the battlefield.

" So much the worse for him," said Antraguet ; " it is not my fault," and he drew his dagger with his left hand.

CHAPTER XCVII.

THE COMBAT.

THE spot where this terrible encounter was about to take place was sequestered and shaded with trees. It was generally frequented only by children who came to play there during the day, or drunkards and thieves who came to sleep there by night. The barriers placed by the horse venders kept away the crowd, which, similar to the stream of a river, follows a current and is only arrested by an eddy. The passers-by went on their way and did not stop. Besides, it was too early, and the great concourse of people hurried towards Monsoreau's bloody house.

Chicot, his heart palpitating, though his was not a very tender nature, seated himself upon a wooden balustrade in front of the lackeys and pages. He did not like the Angevins. He hated the favorites, but they were all brave young men, and beneath their skin flowed generous blood soon to be shed. D'Epernon made a last bravado.

"What! they are afraid of me," he cried.

"Hold your tongue," said Antraguet.

"I have my rights," said D'Epernon; "we were to be eight in the game."

"Be off," said Ribeirac, impatiently.

He returned with his head in the air, and sheathed his sword.

"Come hither, bravest of men," said Chicot, "or you will lose another pair of shoes as you did yesterday."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that there will soon be blood on the ground, and you will step in it as you did last night."

D'Epernon became deadly pale, and all his conceit fell before this terrible reproach. He seated himself within ten feet of Chicot, at whom he glanced with terror.

Ribeirac and Schomberg approached each other after the usual salutations. Quélus and Antraguet took one step forward and crossed swords. Maugiron and Livarot

stood leaning against a barrier and made feints. The fight began as the Church of Saint Paul struck five. Fury was depicted on the faces of the combatants ; but their closed lips, their threatening pallor, the involuntary trembling of their wrists indicated that this fury was controlled by prudence, and that, like a fiery horse, it would not escape without causing great damage.

For several minutes, which is an enormous length of time, nothing was heard but a clashing of swords. Not one stroke had taken effect. Ribeirac, wearied, or rather satisfied of having tried his adversary, lowered his hand and waited for a moment.

Schomberg advanced rapidly and touched him. His skin became livid, and the blood gushed from his shoulder; he drew back to ascertain the gravity of his wound. Schomberg wished to renew the stroke, but Ribeirac parried and wounded him in the side. Each one had his wound.

"We may now rest for a few seconds if you will," said Ribeirac.

Quélus and Antraguet had now warmed up, but Quélus, having no dagger, was under a great disadvantage ; he was obliged to parry with his left arm, and as this arm was bare, every parry cost him a wound.

Without being seriously hurt, at the end of a few seconds, his hand was cut in many places. Antraguet, on the contrary, understood his advantage, and, no less skilful than Quélus, parried with extreme prudence.

The thrusts told, and without being dangerously hurt, he was losing blood through three wounds in the breast, but at each stroke he would repeat,—

"It is nothing."

Livarot and Maugiron were still untouched. Ribeirac, who was now maddened with pain, rushed against Schomberg. Schomberg did not move one step, and merely held out his sword. Ribeirac received a thrust in the breast, and wounded Schomberg in the neck.

Ribeirac, mortally wounded, placed his left hand on the spot and thus uncovered himself. Schomberg took

advantage of this to inflict upon him a flesh wound. But Ribeirac seized his neighbor's hand with his right, and with his left buried the dagger up to its hilt. The sharp blade cut through the heart.

Schomberg uttered a dull cry and fell on his back, dragging down Ribeirac who still had the sword through his body.

Seeing his friend fall, Livarot rushed to the rescue, pursued by Maugiron. He gained a short distance in this way and aided Ribeirac in the efforts he was making to rid himself of Schomberg's sword. But he was then joined by Maugiron and obliged to defend himself on slippery ground with the sun in his eyes. At the end of a second, a blow of the sword opened Livarot's head, and he dropped his weapon and fell upon his knees. Quélus was closely pursued by Antraguet. Maugiron hastened to bury his sword once more in Livarot's body. Livarot fell down.

D'Epernon uttered a great cry.

Quélus and Maugiron remained alone against Antraguet. Quélus was covered with blood, but his wounds were slight. Maugiron was almost untouched.

Antraguet understood the danger. He had not received a single scratch, but he was beginning to feel fatigue. This was no time to ask for mercy from a wounded man and another fresh from carnage. He pushed aside Quélus' sword, and vaulted lightly over the barrier. Quélus returned the thrust, but found only wood. At this moment Maugiron attacked Antraguet, who turned round. Quélus took advantage of this to pass beneath the barrier.

"He is lost!" cried Chicot.

"*Vive le roi!*" cried D'Epernon; "go it, my lions."

"Silence, monsieur," said Antraguet; "do not insult a man who will fight even to the last breath."

"And one who is not yet dead," cried Livarot, of whom no one was thinking. He rose on his knees and buried his dagger between the shoulders of Maugiron, who dropped down sighing,—

"Jesus! my God! I am dying."

Livarot fell back fainting ; the exertion and anger had exhausted all his remaining strength.

" M. de Quélus," said Antraguet, lowering his sword, " you are a brave man. Surrender, and I give you your life."

" And why should I surrender ? " asked Quélus ; " am I down ? "

" No, but you are wounded and I am not."

" *Vive le roi !*" cried Quélus. " I have still my sword," and he rushed against Antraguet who parried the thrust.

" No, monsieur, you have it no longer," said Antraguet, seizing the sword near the hilt, and wrenching it away ; but he slightly cut his finger in doing so.

" Oh ! a sword, a sword ! " cried Quélus, and bounding like a tiger on Antraguet, he threw both arms around him. Antraguet made no effort to shake him off, but taking his sword in his left hand and his dagger in the other, he began to strike Quélus right and left, covering himself with his enemy's blood, but unable to make him loose his hold.

At every stroke Quélus would cry, " *Vive le roi !*" He even managed to hold the hand that struck him, and twisted himself round his antagonist like a serpent. Antraguet, nearly suffocated, reeled and fell ; but as he did so, he almost crushed the unfortunate Quélus.

" *Vive le roi !*" murmured the latter in agony.

Antraguet succeeded in disengaging his arm, and dealt him a last blow which entered his breast.

" There," he said, " are you satisfied ? "

" *Vive le r—*" whispered Quélus, his eyes fast closing.

This was all. The silence and terror of death reigned on this battlefield. Antraguet rose covered with blood, but it was the blood of his enemy. He had only a slight cut on the hand. D'Epernon made the sign of the cross and fled as though pursued by a ghost. Antraguet threw upon his friends and enemies, upon the dead and the dying, the same glance which Horatius must have thrown on the battlefield which decided the fate of Rome.

Chicot ran and raised Quélus, whose blood was pouring

from nineteen wounds. The motion revived him. He opened his eyes.

"Antraguet," he said, "on my honor, I am innocent of Bussy's death."

"I believe you, monsieur," said Antraguet, greatly moved.

"Fly," murmured Quélus, "fly! the king would never forgive you."

"But I shall not abandon you thus, should the scaffold await me," said Antraguet.

"Save yourself, young man," said Chicot; "you have been saved by a miracle, but do not expect two in one day."

Antraguet approached Ribeirac, who was still breathing.

"Well?" asked the latter.

"We are victorious," replied Antraguet, in a low tone, not to offend Quélus.

"Thank you," said Ribeirac, "now go," and he fainted away.

Antraguet picked up his own sword, which he had dropped in the fray, then those of Quélus, Schomberg, and Maugiron.

"Kill me, monsieur, or leave me my sword," said Quélus.

"Here it is, Monsieur le Comte," said Antraguet, with a courteous bow. A tear shone in the eyes of the wounded man.

"We might have been friends," he murmured. Antraguet gave him his hand.

"You cannot be more chivalrous, Antraguet," said Chicot; "but fly, you are worthy of living."

"And my companions?" asked the young man.

"I shall take care of them, as well as of the king's friends."

Antraguet wrapped himself up in the cloak which his squire threw over him, thus concealing the blood with which he was covered; and leaving the dead and dying amid the pages and lackeys, he disappeared through the Porte Saint-Antoine.

CHAPTER XCVIII.

THE END.

THE king, pale with anxiety, and starting at the slightest noise, was pacing his room and conjecturing with the experience of a practised man the time that his friends would take to join and fight their adversaries, as well as the good or bad possibilities afforded them by their character, their force, or their skill.

“Now,” he said at first, “they are crossing the Rue Saint-Antoine ; now they are entering the lists ; now they draw their swords and begin.”

At these words the poor king trembled and began to pray ; but his heart was full of other feelings, and the prayers came only from his lips. At the end of a few moments, he rose.

“If Quélus will only remember the thrust I taught him. As for Schomberg, he is so cool that he ought to kill Ribeirac. If Maugiron is not unlucky, he will quickly rid himself of Livarot. But D’Epernon ! oh, he is a dead man. Luckily he is the one I love the least. But alas ! his death is not all, because after he is dead, Bussy, the terrible Bussy, will fall upon the others. Ah ! my poor Quélus, my poor Schomberg, my poor Maugiron.”

“Sire !” said Crillon at the door.

“What, already !” cried the king.

“No, sire, I bring no news, only the Duc d’Anjou wishes to speak to your Majesty.”

“What for ?” asked the king, still talking through the door.

“He says that the time has come for him to tell your Majesty the nature of the service he has rendered him, and that what he has to tell the king will greatly calm his fears.”

“Well, let him come,” said Henri.

Just as Crillon turned round, rapid footsteps were heard to approach, and a voice said,—

“ I must speak to the king at once.”

The king recognized the voice and opened the door.

“ Come, Saint-Luc,” he said, “ what is the matter ? What has happened, *mon Dieu !* are they dead ? ”

Saint-Luc rushed into the room, without hat or sword, pale and covered with blood.

“ Sire,” he said, throwing himself at the king’s feet, “ vengeance ! I have come to ask for vengeance.”

“ What is the matter, my poor Saint-Luc ? Speak, what can have caused this despair ? ”

“ Sire, the noblest of your subjects, the bravest of your soldiers—” Here his voice failed him.

“ What ? ” asked Crillon, who thought he had a right to the last title.

“ Was murdered, treacherously murdered last night,” continued Saint-Luc.

The king, who was absorbed by a single thought, was reassured when he heard this. It was not one of his four friends, since he had seen them all that morning.

“ Murdered ! ” said the king. “ Of whom are you speaking ? ”

“ Sire, I know you do not love him,” replied Saint-Luc ; “ but he was faithful and would have given his life for your Majesty ; otherwise he would not have been my friend.”

“ Ah,” said the king who was beginning to understand ; and something like a flash, if not of joy at least of hope, illumined his face.

“ Vengeance, sire, for M. de Bussy,” cried Saint-Luc.

“ For M. de Bussy,” repeated the king, laying stress on each syllable.

“ Yes, M. de Bussy, whom twenty assassins murdered last night. He killed fourteen of them.”

“ M. de Bussy dead ! ”

“ Yes, sire.”

“ Then he cannot fight this morning,” said the king, carried away by an irresistible impulse.

Saint-Luc gave the king a glance so reproachful that

he turned away his head, and in doing so saw Crillon still standing near the door awaiting orders. He made him a sign to bring in the Duc d'Anjou.

"No, sire," added Saint-Luc in a severe tone. "M. de Bussy did not fight and that is why I come to ask not for vengeance,—I was wrong to say it,—but for justice. I love my king and my king's honor above all things, and I think that those who killed M. de Bussy have rendered a very poor service to your Majesty."

The Duc d'Anjou had just reached the door. He stood there, motionless as a bronze statue. Saint-Luc's words enlightened the king; they recalled to his mind the service which the duke pretended to have rendered him. He exchanged a glance with the duke who at the same slightly nodded his head in assent.

"Do you know what they will say?" asked Saint-Luc. "They will say that if your friends are victorious, it is because you murdered Bussy."

"And who will say this, monsieur?" asked the king.

"Everybody, *pardieu*," said Crillon, who joined in the conversation as was his wont.

"No, monsieur," said the king, overcome by the opinion of the man, who since Bussy's death was the bravest in the land. "No, that shall not be said, for you will name the assassin."

Saint-Luc saw a shadow advance, and turning round recognized the Duc d'Anjou.

"Yes, sire, I shall name him," he said; "for I wish above all things to clear your Majesty from such a heinous accusation."

"Well, speak."

The duke stood quietly waiting. Crillon stood behind him shaking his head and glaring at him.

"Sire," said Saint-Luc, "last night they laid a snare for Bussy. While he was visiting a woman who loved him, her husband, warned by a traitor, entered the house with a troop of assassins. They were everywhere,—in the street, in the court, and even in the garden."

If the king's room had not been so dark, they would

have seen the Duc d'Anjou turn pale, notwithstanding his powers of self-control.

"Bussy fought like a lion, sire, but numbers overwhelmed him—"

"And he was killed, and justly," interrupted the king.

"I shall certainly not avenge an adulterer."

"Sire, I have not finished my story. The unhappy man, after having defended himself for more than half an hour and triumphed over his enemies in the house, escaped, wounded, bleeding, mutilated; he only wanted some one to lend him a helping hand. I would surely have done so myself, had I not been seized and bound hand and foot by his assassins, together with the woman whom he had placed under my protection. Unfortunately they forgot to deprive me of sight as well as of speech, for I saw two men approach the unfortunate Bussy caught on the iron spikes. I heard the wounded man ask for help, for in these two men he had every right to count on two friends. Well, sire, this is horrible to tell, but it was far more horrible to see and hear. One ordered that he should be shot, and the other obeyed."

Crillon clinched his fist and frowned.

"And you know the assassin?" asked the king, moved in spite of himself.

"Yes," said Saint-Luc, and turning towards the prince he said, with all his pent-up hatred bursting forth in his words and gestures,—

"It is Monseigneur! The assassin is the prince! The assassin is the friend!"

The king was expecting the blow; the duke received it without emotion.

"Yes," he said calmly,—"yes, M. de Saint-Luc saw and heard rightly. I had M. de Bussy killed, and your Majesty will appreciate this action, for M. de Bussy was my servant; but this morning, in spite of my expostulations, he was to fight against your Majesty."

"You lie, assassin," cried Saint-Luc. "Bussy, covered with wounds, with his hand cut to pieces, with a bullet through his shoulder,—Bussy hanging suspended

from the iron spikes could only inspire pity in his most cruel enemies, and they would have helped him. But you, the assassin of La Mole and Coonnas, you killed Bussy as you have killed all your friends one after the other ! You killed Bussy, not because he was your brother's enemy, but because he was the confidant of your secrets. Ah, Monsoreau knew well your reason for this crime."

"*Cordieu !*" murmured Crillon, " why am I not the king ! "

" I am insulted in your presence, brother," said the duke, pale with terror ; for between Crillon's clinched hand and Saint-Luc's bloodthirsty look he did not feel safe.

" Leave us, Crillon," said the king.

Crillon obeyed.

" Justice, *sire*, justice ! " repeated Saint-Luc.

" Sire," said the duke. " will you punish me for having saved your Majesty's friends, and for having done justice to your cause which is also mine ? "

" And I," replied Saint-Luc, who could no longer contain himself, " I say that the cause you uphold is accursed, and that the anger of God will follow your footsteps. Sire, your brother has protected our friends, woe to them ! "

The king shuddered in terror. At this moment they heard rapid footsteps and a hasty interchange of words, followed by a deep silence. And then, as if a voice from Heaven came to confirm Saint-Luc's words, three blows were struck slowly and solemnly on the door by Crillon's vigorous arm.

Henri grew ghastly pale, and his features contracted.

" Vanquished ! " he cried, " my poor friends."

" What did I tell you, *sire* ? " cried Saint-Luc.

The duke clasped his hands in terror.

" See, coward ! " cried the young man with superb contempt. " It is thus that assassinations save the honor of princes ! Come and kill me, too. I have no sword." And he flung his silk glove into the duke's face. François uttered a cry of rage and became livid ; but the king

saw and heard nothing ; he had buried his face in his hands.

“ Oh ! ” he said, “ my poor friends are vanquished, wounded ! Oh ! who will give me certain news of them ? ”

“ I, sire,” said Chicot.

The king recognized this friendly voice, and held out his arms.

“ Well ? ” he asked.

“ Two are already dead and the third is breathing his last.”

“ Who is the third who is not yet dead ? ”

“ Quélus, sire,”

“ Where is he ? ”

“ At the Hôtel de Boissy.”

The king waited to hear no more, and rushed from the room uttering lamentable cries.

Saint-Luc had conducted Diane home to his wife ; hence his delay in reaching the Louvre.

Jeanne spent three days and nights watching her through the most frightful delirium. On the fourth day, Jeanne, overcome by fatigue, went to take a little rest. When she returned two hours later, Diane had disappeared.

Quélus, the only one of the king’s champions who had survived with nineteen wounds, died in the arms of the king, after an agony of thirty days, at the same Hôtel de Boissy whither Chicot had him carried.

Henri was inconsolable. He raised three magnificent tombs for his friends, and had their effigies carved in marble on the top. He had innumerable masses said for them, recommended them to the prayers of the priests, and added to his daily orisons this distich which he repeated every morning and evening to the end of his life,—

“ Que Dieu reçoive en son giron,
Quélus, Schomberg, et Maugiron.”

For nearly three months, Crillon kept guard over the Duc d’Anjou, against whom the king conceived a profound hatred and whom he never forgave.

It was now the month of September ; and Chicot who did not leave his master, and who would have consoled Henri had he been consolable, received the following letter, dated from the priory of Beaume. It was written in a clerical hand,—

DEAR MONSIEUR CHICOT,—The air is soft in our country, and the vintage of Burgundy promises to be good this year. They say that the king whose life I seem to have saved still grieves very much. Bring him to the priory, dear Monsieur Chicot, and we shall make him drink some wine of 1550, which I discovered in my cellar, and which could make one forget the greatest sorrows. This will please him, I am sure ; for I find in the Holy Scriptures these words, “ Good wine rejoices the heart of man.” This is very fine in Latin, and I shall make you read it. Come, then, dear Monsieur Chicot, come with the king, with M. d’Epernon, with M. de Saint-Luc, and we will fatten them all.

The reverend prior,

DOM GORENFLOT,

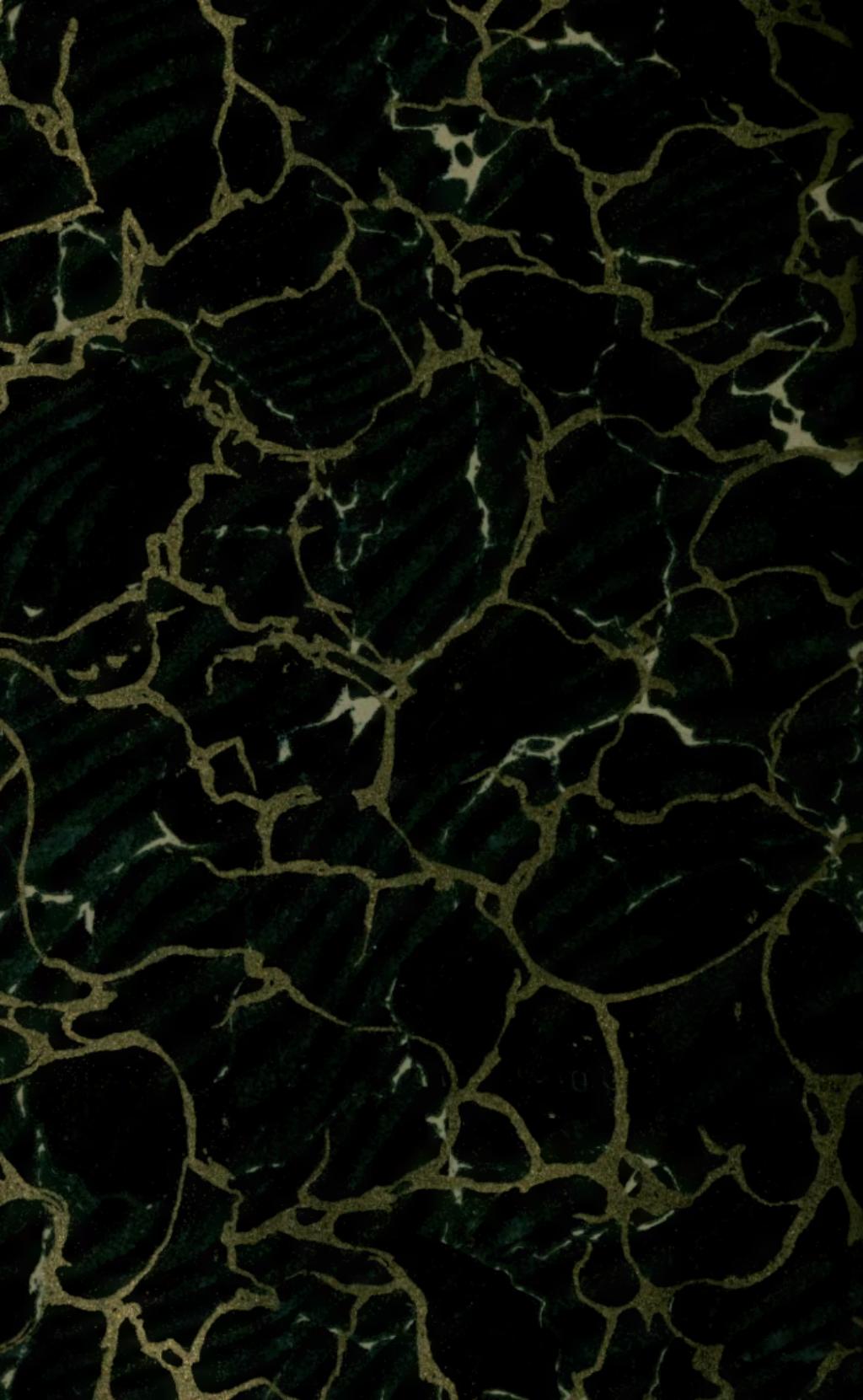
Your humble servant and friend.

P.S.—You will tell the king that I have not yet had time to pray for the souls of his friends, as he requested, on account of the occupations attendant on my arrival here ; but as soon as the vintage is over, I shall surely see to them.

“ Amen,” said Chicot ; “ here are poor devils well recommended to God ! ”

THE END.





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